

Pink perceptions:
Pink Perceptions: the information needs of
lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
library users as perceived by public
librarians and by the LGBT communities
within Sheffield UK and Denver CO, USA

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Dedications

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Table of Contents

Abstract	5
Chapter 1: Introduction	7
1.1 Specific Aims and Objectives	10
1.2 Terms of Reference	10
Chapter 2: Background Literature	13
2.1 Libraries	14
2.1.1 Governmental influences	17
2.1.1a UK Government Influence	18
2.1.1b US Government Influence	21
2.2 LGBT	22
2.3 Issues Covered in this Literature	29
Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods of Investigation	32
3.1 Notes on the investigation method	34
3.1.1 Sheffield	34
3.1.2 Denver	36
3.1.3 Training Sessions	37
Chapter 4: Results Analysis: Librarians	39
4.1 Introduction	39
4.2 Sheffield Librarians	40
4.2.1 Users' background and influences on stock policy	40
4.2.2 How are LGBT patrons provided for?	44
4.2.3 Looking to improve future service	50
4.2.4 Conclusions	51
4.3 Denver Librarians	53
4.3.1 Users' background and influences on collection policy	54
4.3.2 How are LGBT patrons provided for?	57
4.3.3 Promotion and looking to the future	60
4.3.4 Conclusions	62
Chapter 5: LGBT Users	64

5.1 Introduction	64
5.2 Sheffield's LGBT Patrons	65
5.2.1 <i>Library usage and environment</i>	66
5.2.2 <i>Changing LGBT needs and distribution of stock</i>	68
5.2.3 <i>Non-Library resources, outreach, training and desired material</i>	72
5.2.4 <i>Conclusions</i>	74
5.3 Denver's LGBT Patrons	75
5.3.1 <i>Library usage and environment</i>	76
5.3.2 <i>Changing LGBT needs and distribution of stock</i>	78
5.3.3 <i>Non-Library resources, outreach, training and desired material</i>	80
5.3.4 <i>Conclusions</i>	83
Chapter 6: Other Information Sources	85
6.1 Librarian Training Course	85
6.2 Trade Union Awareness of LGBT Issues	86
Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations	88
7.1 General Overview	88
7.2 Summary: Librarians	89
7.2.1 <i>General background</i>	90
7.2.2 <i>Provision for library patrons</i>	92
7.2.3 <i>Promotion, training, and outreach</i>	93
7.3 Recommendations: Libraries	95
7.4 Summary: LGBT Users	96
7.4.1 <i>Background usage</i>	97
7.4.2 <i>Changing needs and distribution of stock</i>	98
7.4.3 <i>Non-Library resources, partnerships, training and collections</i>	99
7.5 Recommendations: LGBT Patrons	100
Chapter 8: Further Research	102
Bibliography	103
Appendix A: Interview schedule for librarians	109
Appendix B: Interview questions for LGBT	110

Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the perceptions of LGBT people and public librarians regarding the provision of library materials to LGBT people in Denver, USA and Sheffield, UK and to determine whether these two library systems provide for the needs and desires of these LGBT communities. These two cities were chosen not only because they have roughly similar populations, cultures, politics and socio-economic backgrounds but also because the differences between them were sufficient as to offer different perceptions of LGBT library services and perhaps lead to new ideas about library provision not only for the two cities studied but other libraries in the USA or the UK.

To establish a framework of outside influences that might affect LGBT service in public libraries, or influence the perceptions or needs of LGBT people and librarians, this study looks at governmental, library association, internal library documents, and the few studies conducted on LGBT people and their information needs. As there is sparse documentation on the chosen topic, outside information sessions in the form of a LGBT library training course and a Trade Union Congress/LGBT history event were attended to formulate the questions needed for this research project.

The data from the LGBT and librarian questionnaires were gathered in a variety of ways (written, verbal, and electronic) due to sensitivity and logistical problems commonly associated with LGBT issues and a multi-national study. There were a total of 67 respondents, across these formats and between the four groups (US and UK, LGBT and Librarians).

From the data provided by the 67 participants and the background literature, several general similarities and differences were drawn between these two cities and between these two countries. The LGBT participants were similar in that they needed information positively confirming their sexuality and their unique lifestyle intricacies; they were similar also in their fear of discrimination or being outed within small libraries and their perceived lack of up to date materials for LGBT people, which were deterrents from using the library for their information needs. The main differences are that US LGBT people are more willing to request materials tailored to their needs, while UK LGBT participants are more likely to seek information from their trade union

representatives. The librarian participants were more similar, and the differences were mainly due to structural and financial differences. The differences in perceptions came from the Sheffield librarians' perception that LGBT collections were there for everyone and should not be promoted or treated differently over the rest of the stock. The Denver librarian participants were much more involved with the LGBT material, informal outreach efforts, and LGBT employee recognition.

Not all of the topics attached to this project could be answered with the time and data available. Suggestions for improvement are made for Denver, Sheffield, librarians, and LGBT people and are provided in addition to suggestions for further needed studies on the topics of LGBT information needs and library provision of LGBT information.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This analysis of the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) library users arose both out of the researcher's personal interest in this subject and from a perceived lack of adequate information resources for Sheffield's LGBT community – a perception first gained when the researcher attempted to look up the Sheffield City Library LGBT stock collection via the library's online catalogue. Materials seemed scarce when performing an online search, and only after the researcher visited the library in person was a section of fiction material discovered. Also, when asking for information on LGBT groups in the area (after having first been asked to explain the term 'LGBT'), the researcher was given a list that had not been updated in three or four years. Such service provision begs the question of just how library employees perceive the importance of their services to LGBT patrons. After all, a list of community support organisations is not difficult to compile; one has only to search on the Internet or, in the case of LGBT social groups, contact Stonewall, the national LGBT activist group. If such an item was itself not regularly updated, the researcher questioned how important it was for the library system to keep the rest of the materials that LGBT patrons might want. On the flip side of the issue, why had it taken local LGBT social and support groups four years to contact the library with new details? Perhaps the LGBT groups or the LGBT population on a whole did not perceive the public library as a first port of call for information about social and community events, let alone any of other LGBT information needs. These questions formed the impetus for the research found in this paper: If a clear analysis could be made of how libraries and LGBT patrons perceive each other, then both groups could benefit. Libraries – in this case, the Sheffield and

Denver public library systems – could understand their LGBT users’ needs and perceptions and how to improve library services, and LGBT users could gain a clearer perception of what the public library system can offer them. It was therefore felt that an investigation into the perception and provision of information to LGBT users would be a valuable contribution to librarians both locally and nationally – and perhaps even internationally.

In looking at the background literature for this topic, it was found that most existing documentation on LGBT communities – both in terms of academic research and librarianship materials – has been produced in the United States. Both the UK and the USA share similar social and cultural backgrounds, thus making their respective user bases not dissimilar. However, there are considerable differences in legal and government/library organisational environments between the two countries, allowing the researcher to compare the two systems and discover if different regulatory or organisational environments affect the services provided. The city of Denver, in the state of Colorado, was chosen as a sister city to Sheffield due to their shared political, socio-economic and cultural demographics and because of the researcher’s own familiarity with the Denver area.

On a superficial level, upon first examination of the Sheffield and Denver (DPL) public library systems, it appeared that DPL was providing a superior set of services to their LGBT users than Sheffield. This observation was made by examining the results achieved by typing in simple keyword queries, such as *gay*, *lesbian*, *bisexual* and *transgender*, into the two libraries’ Internet and catalogue search facilities. It was felt that for first-time LGBT library users – perhaps even those who were yet to come out, or

those who were curious about their sexuality – these simple keyword searches would be the most likely to be used. Later, one of the interviewees for this project – who was both a librarian and a member of the LGBT community – confirmed this assumption.

Looking at the results of these searches, one would think that there were few, if any, resources at Sheffield libraries, whereas at DPL, every LGBT material the community might desire was on stock. It was the intention of the researcher to determine if this initial impression was, in fact, correct, or if there were mitigating circumstances that influenced these simple-search results. To further investigate this, the researcher looked into the background literature of LGBT people and libraries in both the Denver and Sheffield metropolitan areas; in addition, personal and demographic data was collected from 66 (librarian and LGBT) research participants, historical background from one former Sheffield library employee, cultural context from an LGBT history month event and information on library training from a librarians' workshop on LGBT patrons' needs. In examining these sources, the researcher aimed to find reasons for the disparity of provision between Sheffield and Denver, and to illuminate to all parties involved the perceptions of these groups and the materials available to them – as well as ways in which each group can work to make the transfer of information between each party as beneficial as possible.

1.1 Specific Aims and Objectives

Aims:

The aim of this project is to examine the ways in which LGBT individuals and public librarians in Denver and Sheffield perceive the information needs of this minority group, and to what extent these needs are provided for in both cities' public libraries.

Objectives:

- Assess the extent to which the LGBT community uses public libraries
- Determine what content and arrangement of LGBT-centred information would be helpful in libraries
- Examine how the information needs of LGBT patrons change over time
- Assess how library materials are promoted and access provided
- Examine the importance of outreach co-operation and librarian training, as perceived by both LGBT people and librarians
- Compare and contrast the Sheffield and Denver library communities with regards to politics, staff, and stock management and their effects on LGBT service provision

1.2 Terms of reference

Throughout this paper, the primary term used to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender users will be the commonly accepted *LGBT*. It is acknowledged that this grouping neglects the fact that each of these four groups has their own unique traits in social beliefs, needs and interactions. However, it is felt that as many prominent civil rights groups and activists within these communities have used this term to describe

themselves both in person and in literature, this paper might also safely use this catchall acronym. The same may be said with the use of *gay*, throughout this paper, as a generic term for the interviewees' own sexuality or for non-heterosexual items in a public library. Again, this was used because it was the term chosen by the interviewees most often as a generic group descriptor. *Queer* and *GLBT* also came up as all-encompassing terms, but were used exclusively in the United States and then only at random intervals.

Another term that was prevalent, particularly in the UK-based interviews and research, was *Section 28*. Section 28 was a law passed in 1988 that outlawed the promotion of information by any local authority regarding homosexuality and their non-government-sanctioned relationships. While this law officially should only have affected governmental services, other public services such as schools and libraries suffered some confusion as to whether or not they could promote LGBT subjects and what that promotion included. It also gave many who were already homophobic an excuse to cut services and censor materials given to the public. However, many libraries and the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) – the UK's national library association – ignored this law, as they published proof that the regulation did not and should not prevent the provision of LGBT information to their patrons. Section 28 was nullified in 2003, but the confusion and discriminatory effects it spawned does still occasionally cast a shadow on library employees' treatment of LGBT library materials and patrons.

Social inclusion is more of a process than a definition in this research, but can essentially be defined as an effort to include previously excluded social groups into everyday social standards. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (2001),

however, defines this further to state that their constituents can have “an impact on social inclusion [by promoting] personal growth and development, community empowerment, representation of inclusive communities, enhancing educational achievement and promoting lifelong learning, tackling unemployment [and] tackling crime.”

In the context of this research *sexual orientation* “is an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual or affectionate attraction to another person [which] exists along a continuum that ranges from exclusive homosexuality to exclusive heterosexuality and includes various forms of bisexuality” (American Psychological Association, 2005). This definition does not include gender identity or biological sexuality, but in the course of this paper sexual orientation is used occasionally to denote all groups included within the term LGBT.

Finally, *coming out* is “the voluntary public announcement of one's sexual orientation, sexual attractions, or gender identity” (Wikipedia, 2005). This term is also used in its shortened version of *out* within this paper to designate someone who has acknowledged their sexuality in some sort of public manner and to indicate that the individual is in the process of being comfortable with their sexuality.

Chapter 2: Background Literature

Though at the outset of research for this paper, it was intimated that any work involving the sensitive subject of LGBT people and any service outside of the health and crime sectors might be limited, the severe lack of documentation regarding public libraries and LGBT people or even information regarding LGBT people and their information needs was not expected. In fact, the very numbers of LGBT people that public libraries could serve has only been guessed at, as no research paper in the US or the UK has effectively listed a definite population of LGBT people. In the United Kingdom, the general population guess is anywhere between five to ten per cent of the national population; in the US, in particular Colorado, the closest estimate is 10,045 same sex households (Sheffield City Council, 2005a; Gaydemographics.org, 2002). Initial literature searching found that most of the documentation that might contribute pertinent information towards this project consisted of government documents on social inclusion and equal opportunity policies within the library and/or local government. Those resources and research studies that were found originated primarily in the United States, but in both countries the documentation found focused mainly on academic clinical studies rather than public library services and LGBT needs. As discussed below, documentation describing LGBT information searching, or the services that LGBT users expect or need in a public library, was even more difficult to find. Also discussed below are various resources found that might help or influence librarians' service to LGBT patrons both in Sheffield and for Denver; this is followed by the main themes or documents that were discovered for American and British LGBT people, and their perceptions of information needs with regard to public libraries.

2.1 Libraries

Before searching for documents originating from outside the library world, even library journals, it was decided to examine influential documents from each country's library associations, as well the one concrete document describing the scope and future of a library collection – the Material Selection Guideline or Collection Development Policy.

CILIP, the UK's national library association, have produced a guidance document regarding sexual orientation that gives a general idea of the rights and obligations librarians have in serving LGBT users or fellow librarians. The first section of this document appears to imitate the guidance given by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and "Sexuality: the New Agenda" – both of which are described in more detail below – as well as give some statistics from various studies regarding the homophobia experienced by LGBT people in workplaces and schools. Basically, CILIP's guidance requests librarians to treat LGBT people as they would any other minority group, and seek to provide information that is pertinent to their needs without discriminating or censoring their stock due to personal beliefs. The document states that materials pertaining to local and national LGBT groups, as well as educational documents regarding coming out, should be a major focus of initial promotions made by the library. CILIP also suggests having regularly updated bibliographic lists of LGBT stock available and putting LGBT books in with ethnic or other minority book promotions. Most important, though, is that "written library stock policies should include the need for material relevant to the needs of LGBT people

across all formats (for example, adult and children's books, music recordings, large print, spoken word, videos, newspapers, and periodicals)" (CILIP, 2004). As this document seems to be the only one that CILIP has produced about sexual orientation in recent years, and if Sheffield's stock policy is anything to go by, libraries have not been heavily influenced by CILIP suggestions – nor have those librarians interviewed for this project, as no one commented about CILIP's suggestions when prompted for outside influences to library procedures. In contrast, the American Library Association (ALA) seems to be much more active in its support of GLBT employees, patrons and censorship issues. According to their literature, they were the first professional body to have a GLBT support group, with their GLBT Round Table coming into being as early as 1970 (ALA, 2005a). Unfortunately, most of the documents and resources that the round table group has put together are for members only. As some people on the American LGBT librarian list serve (2005) have commented, since the ALA has kept the GLBT Round Table a separate organisation with a separate set of yearly events, many non-LGBT librarians might not even be aware of its existence (gay-libn@listproc.edu, 2005). However, other obvious material on the ALA Web site indicates the association's support of its GLBT members, such that stated as within the Library Bill of Rights, intended to be the guiding principles of libraries and librarians: "The American Library Association stringently and unequivocally maintains that libraries and librarians have an obligation to resist efforts that systematically exclude materials dealing with any subject matter, including sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation" (ALA, 2004). The society's activist spirit is also evident from the summaries of its 35th annual conference, in which it suggests efforts that librarians should make to resist new LGBT censorship

laws that some southern American states are attempting to adopt (Clark and Morgan, 2005).

Looking more directly at the two library systems chosen for this study, it is also important to examine their collection policies to determine the different priorities that the libraries place on selection of material. For Sheffield public libraries, their emphasis is supposedly on the content and then the authority of the material. Compared to the collections policy published on DPL's Web site, Sheffield's collection policy is much more of a business plan than a public relations document. That said, they do mention that within their fiction collection, they aim to fill gaps in existing stock and provide for less represented viewpoints – however, higher on the list of requirements for selection is that the book must “contribute to an area of provision we are seeking to prioritise” (MacDonald, 1994). This begs the question of who Sheffield libraries are trying to prioritise – those groups that are recorded in the circulation statistics, or those minorities with higher profiles? As discussed later in this paper, many LGBT people feel that they have been put aside in favour of more visible socially excluded groups; however, one finds that LGBT people do serve to increase the popular circulation statistics, and are part of these more visible minorities as well. Other points of interest that come up in Sheffield's materials selection guidelines are those discussing the caution that must be taken in selecting appropriate material for minors, as well as a concept foreign to American libraries: the ability to generate revenue as a factor for choosing videos, DVDs and music for circulating multimedia collections (MacDonald, 1994).

In contrast, the Denver Public Library may seem to have a much more liberal and realistic viewpoint of the selection process. In their collections management policy, they

discuss the fact that it is the responsibility of the parent or guardian, rather than the library, to determine what is acceptable for their child to read; thus, children are allowed to check out whatever material they might want without a librarian's judgment of propriety coming into play. DPL also allows for their collections to be influenced by the demands and interests of the community, the publicity and critical reviews of a requested author and whether any particular material is available electronically or via ownership of other regional agencies. All of this is summarised in the collections policy's introduction:

“The collection development policy, approved by the Library Commission, is one of the library's fundamental policy documents. It outlines the philosophies that create and shape the Denver Public Library's unique collection, the practices that maintain it over time and the guidelines that help the collection respond to community needs while protecting the collection from societal and political pressures” (DPL, 2005b).

This last phrase is particularly relevant; political pressures have been very much evident in DPL recently in the form of state funding cuts lowering their budget by 1.5%, putting pressure on their system to cut up to 30% of the materials fund over the 2004/2005 fiscal year (DPL, 2005a).

2.1.1 Governmental influences

The fiscal difficulties in DPL's present and the hardships of Sheffield Library's past prompts an initial analysis that as most public libraries receive the majority of their funding from city or regional government, an examination of local and national laws, regulations and public policies might show some of the background influences on public library policy (Denver Public Library, 2005a; Audit Commission, 2001).

2.1.1a *UK Government Influence*

In the UK, the effect of local and national party ideals have a visible influence on programmes and funding processes for public libraries. Depending on which party is in power, different socio-political agendas are promoted. Since the 1997 ascension into power by Britain's Labour party, the socio-political policies aimed at museums, libraries and archives (MLA) seem to push libraries to be all things to everyone, with a particular emphasis on education, economic regeneration and social inclusion (Matarasso, 2000). In this paper the focus is primarily upon libraries' social inclusion responsibilities, with a secondary emphasis on the educational role libraries play in providing a positive, non-biased view of LGBT people.

Social inclusion policies are aimed at instructing public services to seek out and provide for those groups previously under-served. Several social inclusion policies that potentially affect UK public libraries, though not specifically addressing the LGBT user group, have been published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). It is emphasised in "Museums, Libraries and Archives for All" (2001: 6) that while developing and executing a social inclusion service plan, British public libraries should "identify and create opportunities to act in partnership with other organisations. Partners will often bring specialist knowledge and advice on targeting socially excluded groups." On top of seeking active input from community experts and the community itself, the DCMS (2000) policy document also emphasises the need for training to meet the National Occupational Standards. The policy is accompanied by a six-step plan suggested by DCMS for any local authority or library implementing a social inclusion programme (DCMS, 2000; 21-25):

- Identify the people who are socially excluded and their distribution
- Assess and review current practice
- Develop strategic objectives and prioritise resources
- Develop the services and train staff to provide them
- Implement the services and publicise them
- Evaluate success, review and improve

While it may be useful to examine how the Sheffield and Denver library systems measured up to this six-step process, it was decided not to use these points for key analysis both because of the inaccessibility of all pertinent documents and because the time scale required for such an effort would be beyond the remit of this project.

However, the themes from the first three points of the DCMS plan have been integrated into this study to examine how well Sheffield and Denver public libraries were able to identify the LGBT population, engage them and develop and prioritise their needs within their current practices. It is acknowledged that Denver is not subject to a government plan such as the DCMS suggested procedure, but it is implicit that most libraries would follow a similar process in developing services for a particular user group.

A more recent guidance document, “Sexuality: the New Agenda” – made in conjunction with the LGA (Local Government Association), Stonewall (the LGBT political group) and the Employers’ Organisation (2003) – gives local authorities advice on how to “engage with LGB communities” (it is assumed that transgender issues are not addressed in this document) (Employers’ Organisation, 2003). One of the primary concerns in this paper is that

“within local authorities lesbian, gay, and bisexual equality risks being sidelined because it is seen as an unrelated to political priorities and an optional extra in the face of more ‘deprived’ communities. This leads to a vicious circle in which lack of understanding, combined with homophobia, exacerbates the problems faced by lesbian, gay and bisexual people by denying them equal access to public services” (Employers’ Organization, 2003:9).

“Sexuality: the New Agenda” does address libraries as one of the top resources for distributing LGB information needs, but primarily in conjunction with other local authority agencies. The paper also discusses how public services can use other laws or directives to further mainstream LGB service within local authorities by using them as leverage; examples of this include the equality standards already applied to other minorities, audit reports such as Best Value, which benchmarks value for money against other local authorities, or Comprehensive Performance Analysis, in which audit commissioners determine how well an authority has been performing and how it can be improved in the future (Employers’ Organisation, 2003). All of these analyses are of vital importance to authorities or public services such as libraries, because government allocation of funds is determined by these reports.

A further point of interest brought up in “Sexuality: the New Agenda” (2003) – also found in many other documents regarding LGBT people – was the fact that each of the people who identify themselves as LGBT are not entirely defined by their sexuality, and might have other needs or self-identifiers that should be taken into account along with their sexuality. An LGBT library user might also be Muslim, disabled, a parent or

live in a rural area – or any combination of these – and all of these items have different service needs affecting library provision.

Another set of laws that has been heavily promoted, and is a key point in “Sexuality: the New Agenda”, is the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003, which outlaw any discrimination in determining employment status or benefits on account of sexual orientation. Interestingly, these regulations happen to be among the few items uncovered by this researcher that most library employees in this study were aware of.

Those documents discussing some of the background literature that discusses the multitude of user backgrounds and the implied needs of these backgrounds will be detailed below, but before getting to that one should mention those few federal or local agencies in the US that have affected public library service.

2.1.1b *US Government Influence*

One item dramatically affecting every aspect of information provision – perhaps even the defining factor between the information service perceptions in Britain and America – is the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. This amendment, addressing freedom of speech, is so ubiquitous in America most Americans take for granted (Mount, 2005). This is not to say that there is no British equivalent to the First Amendment – to be pointed out is article 10 of the Human Rights Act of 1998 (HMSO, 1998) – but the right to free speech does not have such a prominent place in the mindset of Britain as in America. This partially explains the practice of some American libraries of erasing patrons’ records of all books checked out except those currently being

borrowed. In fact, this sort of First Amendment action nullifies in a way the more recent Patriot Act, which allows federal agents to request the library records of patrons in the event of a terrorism investigation; giving in this way patrons privacy and freedom of expression in the form of the books they read has long been a hallmark of what American libraries stand for (ALA, 2005b; EPIC, 2001).

However, America has not been free of barriers to LGBT equal opportunities and negative governmental legislation. For example, Colorado passed an amendment to the state's constitution that was almost as potentially oppressive as Section 28 in the UK. Amendment 2 essentially disallowed 'special' privileges like adding sexual orientation to equal opportunity employment lists (similar to British Employment Equality Regulations), or the development of non-discrimination laws within the state. Supporters of this law suggested that sexual orientation was not as much a factor for discrimination in the workplace as variables such as gender or religious affiliation. However, Colorado's Amendment 2 was repealed shortly after being passed because it violated Amendment 14 of the U.S. Constitution, which is widely interpreted as granting equal rights to all Americans regardless of their background (Mount, 2005; Constitutional Rights Foundation, N.D.).

2.2 LGBT

Although much of the literature relevant to this study is legal or social-inclusion rationale for the existence of LGBT information in public libraries, this fails to address why LGBT people feel the need for information specific to them and why there is justification not just for sections of libraries containing LGBT material, but entire

libraries devoted to these subjects. There are already libraries in the United States, Canada and South Africa exclusively devoted to archiving LGBT material and providing it to the public. The existence of these facilities justifies a discussion of why these libraries have developed and why LGBT people may need information centred around their particular needs – but also why many LGBT people have stopped using standard public library collections in favour of other, more specialised information resources.

Lukenbill (2002) suggests that the modern LGBT public library (or sections of libraries) in North America were only developed after 1969, when the watershed riot at the Stonewall bar in New York awakened LGBT people to political activism. Lukenbill also asserts that before this time, many LGBT people operated under an integration framework in which they tried to blend into society as quietly as possible. After Stonewall, many LGBT people felt the need to define themselves as a separate group with a unique cultural and social life no longer to be quietly sidelined and condemned. Heather (1978:7) acknowledges this trend, but also points out the dichotomy between “those who accept the need for campaigning and those who believe that the campaigning organizations draw too much attention to the gay community”. This first wave of activists began by gathering information about late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers whose work focussed on LGBT people, as well as forming groups with similar political and cultural values to those found in the historical literature. Lukenbill suggests that these actions stemmed from the natural need for all political groups – or indeed individuals – to self-identify, build group ties, improve self-esteem and justify or gain the approval of others. Allen et al., in discussing the need for lesbian-centric books, explains how many lesbians believe that if positive images of homosexuality were

available to straight people that their coming out – or indeed their whole life – would have been easier: “Books do help people make sense of their world and put their experience into a recognizable context: they help validate the experiences of lesbians and lesbian viewpoints, and help women to form a positive view of themselves and their lesbianism. Librarians have a duty to provide material which expresses the experience and reality of the lives of a sizable proportion of the population” (Allen et al.: 2). This “sizable proportion of the population” – 10% of the UK population – needs an objective view of their history and assurance that there are others experiencing what they are experiencing, but they either do not try to find this information at local libraries or find their libraries inadequate (Vincent, 2005). Keeping this concept in mind, this study has included interviews of both librarians and LGBT people to discover why, at least in the two cities selected, some LGBT people do not use library resources or perceive that libraries do not provide sufficient LGBT material.

According to Branching Out, a LGBT publisher and training company, one of the reasons that public libraries do not have adequate LGBT collections is that they do not have the training or know-how to find material for LGBT people. “This was compounded by the largely passive culture of adult public libraries; library staff were always ready to respond to requests but there was no expectation of active intervention to open up reading choices, or understanding of promotional techniques to create a demand, rather than simply respond to it” (Branching Out, 2005). One notable exception to this trend may be the Brighton and Hove public libraries, where public forums, surveys and meetings with local LGBT groups were sought to give input about subject matter and arrangement of LGBT materials (Norman, 1999). Keeping this in

mind, the interview questions used in this project sought to discover if the Sheffield and Denver libraries used any similar techniques; additionally, the interviews investigated whether librarians or LGBT users felt there should be special considerations for providing potentially sensitive information to younger patrons.

When examining existing literature from both America and Britain, it would seem an agreed opinion that public libraries should consider not only adult LGBT patrons, but minors as well. In a recent library training session, long-time gay training advisor John Vincent hinted at several librarian groups that he had attempted to train in LGBT matters – although he would not name names – who were resistant to his efforts, declaring that ‘there aren’t people like that in our community’, that parents might create trouble because of what they deemed inappropriate material or that they already had some older books that should satisfy any who came in. “Sexuality: the New Agenda” (2003) states that a contributing factor to this problem is that many local authority services automatically assume a heterosexual stance in what they provide, discounting in particular cross-minority groupings such as the possibility that the visiting Muslim woman with a child in tow might be a lesbian as well. As for leaving service provision to older materials, it is alleged that many of them are “inaccurate, soul-destroying and insulting material, all of which can contribute to self-hatred and bitterness” (Allen, et.al. 1989). Keeping in mind the radical changes in GLBT information availability since Stonewall alone, it can be suggested that more up-to-date material should be on hand – particularly for younger people, who must often counter stereotyped images in the media and bullying from fellow students. All youth, whether gay or straight, need positive images of those that are LGBT (Eckford, 1998). But as Hellenius (2001) questions,

“How does a closeted teen come across positive information? School libraries, if not subject to censorship of LGBT material, are vulnerable places for questioning students to explore the literature. Therefore, if youth are inclined to go to a library at all, they are more likely to seek answers in a public library”. This goes back full circle to John Vincent, who suggests that many libraries question whether youngsters even know that they are gay at a young age; according to him, they do, and usually they know that they are ‘different’ as early as 10 years of age. This observation has been reinforced by other statistics that tell of the high rate of homeless LGBT youth; additionally, because of the depression caused by social and mental bullying, the attempted suicide rate of LGBT youths is around 40% –30% more than their heterosexual teen peers (Cant, 2002; Hellenius, 2001). Hellenius suggests that libraries could make a tangible difference on these figures by providing LGBT youth with fiction and non-fiction helping them to understand what they are feeling and how to deal with self, parents and peers. With resources like Library Q (an online ‘queer’ library) and ever-expanding resources for reviews of newly published LGBT material – such as the Pink Paper, the LGBT resources at Yale University and most gender studies syllabuses found online at American universities – it can be alleged that libraries should have no problem finding useful material.

While this study begins with the assumption that both Sheffield and Denver libraries have collections of LGBT materials, this research seeks to find how these libraries display their stock and what tools they use to help LGBT people find the information they need. The issue of how LGBT material should be displayed is often a battle between those who believe LGBT books should be integrated with the rest of the

stock – as the librarians in a Brighton and Hove survey said – or separate and potentially easier to find, as stated by bookshop patrons in the same survey (Norman 1999).

Unfortunately, the situation is not as simple as integrating or not integrating LGBT materials. There are those within the LGBT community that are either reluctant to enter the ‘gay ghetto’ area of separately shelved LGBT material, or are afraid of asking librarians for help because they believe that they will be discriminated against; this is a particularly valid concern in small town or branch libraries, where the librarian questioned might be acquainted with parents, church members or other people who do not have knowledge of the patron’s sexual identity (Gough and Greenblatt, 1992; Eckford, 1998).

Keeping this in mind, it can be argued that alternate ways of searching for information must be available to those that are not bold enough to ask a librarian, or who may be too busy or too shy to come in to the library to browse material. Promotion is key, whether in the form of regularly updated bibliographic lists or a well-structured online catalogue. However, the problem with cataloguing LGBT material online alongside other library materials is that many cataloguing systems, such as Dewey or Library of Congress, do not have standard keywords conducive to LGBT subject material – many have yet to entirely catch up from the days when *homosexual* was classified next to *mental disorders* (Gough and Greenblatt, 1992; Greenblatt, 2001). Denver may have had an advantage over Sheffield in this matter up until 2001 in the form of Sandy Berman, a strong advocate for changing standard Library of Congress headings to more sensitive subject headings for LGBT material (Greenblatt, 2001).

For those who are bold enough to ask a librarian for information on coming out or other sensitive LGBT topics, Ann Curry (2004) suggests there may also be the additional barrier of library reference workers that are either untrained or hostile to alternative lifestyles. In a study involving a teenager asking reference librarians in 20 different libraries for information on LGBT issues, the tester, because of the treatment she received by librarians, would return to only nine of these libraries to request further information. Many of the librarians were confused, cold, standoffish, judgemental or raised eyebrows – worse yet, five of them fled at the first opportunity to do so. However, there were also a few who exhibited interest, showed the patron how to find more material and conducted follow-up questions to make sure that all her queries were answered (Curry, 2001).

Finally, this project attempts to find out what information LGBT people in Sheffield and Denver would find useful in their local public library at different times in their lives. Lee (in Hardwood, 1999) indicates that each subsection within the LGBT designator had different information needs; for example, older gay males are more concerned with health issues such as HIV/AIDS, and younger gay males are more concerned with age of consent laws that limit the age for homosexuals to 18 instead of 16 as is the case for heterosexual couples. Norman (1999) offers more general suggestions for what LGBT people might want from libraries, such as fiction by and about LGBT people, non-fiction in the form of history, newspapers, political analysis and biographies, reference items like directories, financial and legal information and travel guides, coming-out information and support groups, local community information and self-help and health references.

2.3 Issues covered in this research

A profusion of background literature exists on more specialised topics that cannot be attempted to be covered within the scope of this research project, including how local schools take advantage of public libraries' GLBT resources or how the information acquired by public libraries fits into the network of other information resources available to LGBT people. What is clear, however, after examining the background literature is that to Sheffield and Denver librarians – and in fact most library personnel – the LGBT community has unique information needs, and specialised materials should be provided for this minority group (Sheffield City Council, 2005; Birmingham City Council, 2003; Denver Public Library, 2005). It is also clear from background literature and casual observation that most libraries in both the UK and USA have provided some materials they believe the LGBT community might need; this may include fiction by or about lesbians or gay people, a few non-fiction books on health and victim resources and perhaps specialised serials. What is not clear within the literature, however, is how closely these materials match the actual needs of the LGBT community. In looking at the two chosen cities, this project aims to examine and compare how librarians go about gathering this information – whether through outreach programmes, open forums, staff-awareness training programmes or co-ordination with other organisations. Another aspect examined in both cities' libraries is how chosen materials have been presented both physically and virtually, with particular regard to whether collections have been given a designated LGBT section or if they have been integrated with the rest of the stock. As mentioned in the introduction, observations of

the two library systems' online catalogues were also made to determine if a typical LGBT user could find relevant material without actually coming into the library or asking a librarian.

As stated above, background literature suggests that many LGBT people are averse to indicating their sexual preferences for fear of being rejected or abused by those observing their library selection (Cant, 2002; Hellenius 2001; Purton, 2005). Providing library catalogues in a non-threatening way can make it easier for LGBT users to determine if the information they need is in fact available in an anonymous fashion.

To date, very little has been written about the specific process that LGBT patrons use to get information pertinent to their needs, particularly whether they would prefer the library to group relevant materials together for ease of access or simply integrate LGBT-specific material into the main stacks for reasons of privacy. Even in the Brighton and Hove research project, there were no conclusive results indicating whether integrated or separate stacks were preferred by the majority of patrons using the LGBT collections (Norman, 1999). As McManus pointed out, while the different groups that make up the LGBT community are similar in some of their information needs, there are also strikingly different needs within the LGBT community itself (McManus, 2003), making the task even more difficult; for example, what information a gay male might need when first coming out might be different from the information required once an individual has become more comfortable with his sexuality (Eckford, 1998). This study also seeks out information regarding how the LGBT community perceives the information currently available in Denver and Sheffield public libraries, and if this information is not adequate, what viable changes they would like to see happen. For

example, there is also the possibility that potential library users would prefer not to get information within the library; they might be more comfortable with and get better access to information from sympathetic community centres or similar sources. Those individuals consulted were questioned regarding where and how they have used resources other than the library, and were asked to suggest partnerships that would be helpful between public libraries and these resource agencies.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods of Investigation

As sexual orientation and the needs presented by it are both quite subjective, they cannot be quantitatively defined. What can be done, however, is to gather a portrait in a single point in time of individuals' perceptions under a fixed set of outside influences. This set of experiences can then be generalised to apply to other situations where a similar set of outside influences and situations exist. Thus, "qualitative methods can be used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 11). Qualitative research methods were chosen because they allowed not only the collection of these details, but also the flexibility and adaptability of not assuming predetermined categories or theories that, for the type of research conducted in this paper, would simply not have been viable. Librarians and LGBT patrons are both complex groups of people, and the timeline and funding of this research did not allow for the structure that would be required of a quantitative study (Gorman and Clayton 1997). The grounded structure of qualitative research does, however, allow the researcher to gather similarities once the qualitative data have been collected, thus presenting a valuable insight into the interaction between libraries and LGBT users (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

To gather the potential richness of information within the four groups of contributors to this project (Sheffield and Denver librarians and users), literature indicated that interviews would be the best possible way of gathering a suitable volume and quality of useable data (McManus, 2003). Prior studies also suggested that the

researcher prepare an introductory letter explaining why the subject had been chosen, what the research was trying to find out, how long the interview was expected to take, contact details and, most importantly because of the delicacy of the topics to be discussed, the assurance that all data gathered from the individual would be kept confidential (Gillham, 2000). A further assurance of this confidentiality and description of the project was also given to the interviewee prior to the interview, due to the ethical requirements of the researcher's home institution. However, it must be noted that Lee (in Harwood, 1999) argues that informed consent and introductory letters can be as much of a deterrent as an assurance when it comes to gathering information from participants. Many might be reluctant to participate as they have either been interviewed too many times or they feel that their responses could adversely affect their position in the library (if a librarian) or the services provided to LGBT people (if a patron). This feeling of fear, or perhaps even apathy, may be the reason why many written questionnaires often have poor results. In following Gillham's (2000) suggestions, an interview schedule was developed using semi-structured, open questions encouraging participants to make their own judgements in answering the questions. This is not to say that balanced qualitative interviews do not make room for impromptu prompts in response to interviewees' confusion about particular questions; this interactive nature is often what makes live interviews so productive in their response data. The questions in the interview were also ordered from general to specific, allowing the participant to gradually develop their thought process and become comfortable with the topic at hand. What Gillham (2000) stressed and this research strove to comply with was the

responsibility to conduct interviews live, with the chance to clarify queries and gather facial or intonation cues that help the researcher achieve a clearer picture of the data.

3.1 Notes on the investigation method

Keeping the above in mind, it was initially decided in this study that it would be desirable and perhaps possible to personally interview all those contributing to this research project, whether in person, over the telephone or via electronic means such as Internet 'instant messenger' services. It was also thought that this would achieve the greatest response rate and improve the detail of responses achieved. However, because of the sensitive nature of the research topic and the difficulty of half of the research participants being located in the United States, it was foreseeable that some of the interviewees would choose to respond in a written manner rather than verbally. Another difficulty that was encountered towards the beginning of research was the fact that intermediaries were needed, especially in the initial contact of both LGBT people and librarians.

3.1.1 Sheffield

The first of these contacts was acquired during the above mentioned SINTO Cultural Awareness LGBT training course headed up by John Vincent; this contact proved quite helpful later on to facilitate the Sheffield librarian interviews. Another intermediary, the group leader of Shout!, was found from the list of social/help groups in the information department of Sheffield Central Library. Neither of these contacts was immediately contacted, as it was thought proper to first seek those who were interested

via an introductory letter explaining the purposes of the study. Thus, an introductory letter was sent to Sheffield City Library, those help groups that were located at the Sheffield Centre for HIV and Sexual Health and Sheffield University's two LGB committees. This introductory letter was also sent to the Denver Public Library administrative offices, The Center for LGBT in Colorado, and five different LGBT groups based in Denver.

Unfortunately, due to the time frame of this research project, the indirect approach was not a viable option. After a full two and a half weeks of waiting for responses, with unsatisfactory results, more direct methods were employed to acquire individuals interested in participating in this research. At this time, both of the intermediaries in Sheffield were directly contacted to see if they could help facilitate the process, with satisfactory effect. In the Sheffield libraries, interviews with librarians from the two branches of 23 that contained LGBT collections were set up by a senior manager. These interviews were carried out with members of staff of varying levels of authority – anywhere from frontline staff members to a senior member of staff responsible for one full region of Sheffield.

With the LGBT user respondents in Sheffield, there was some concern by the facilitator from Shout! that as some potential participants were not comfortable with their sexuality or simply with being interviewed by someone unfamiliar, and so the means of responding to the questionnaire should be in written form. As could be intimated by the format of the information gathering, the answers were informative in their brevity. This also encouraged the researcher to seek out an online lesbian social club called Something in Sheffield (SIS) for a better idea of the perceptions of the LGBT

user group. This was highly successful, perhaps due to the anonymity of the Internet and the ease and speed of typing out the answers to the questions; in any case, a great amount of detail and personality were put into the answers given by SIS members. A few were even helpful enough to state that they had not been to the library in many years, but that they were willing to give their perceptions of what it would take for a public library to lure them back. However, of the Sheffield LGBT users, the only individual that the researcher was able to interview in person was a young woman from the University of Sheffield's LGB Committee.

3.1.2 Denver

As for the Denver respondents, achieving contact and attaining either interviews or written responses proved even more difficult than in Sheffield. After some time of waiting for an answer, written requests and multiple e-mails to personnel within the Denver library system proved fruitless. With the exception of one response from HQ76.3/Colorado (a Denver LGBT librarian group) that inquired as to the timeline of my research project and the exact wording of the introductory letter that was to be sent out to their list serve (which unfortunately did not produce any results), there was no response at all from the LGBT groups. As a final effort, the researcher turned to several associates based in Denver to get involved as local researchers for this project. For once in this study, timing was fortunate, as the researchers' activity coincided with the annual Pride Fest in Denver; as a result, many more interviews than expected were carried out by the Denver-based researchers during the two-day event. It should be said, however, that the majority of those interviewed were female, interestingly enough, perhaps due to

the fact that most of the male Fest goers, in the words of one subject, were “busy primping and showing off their muscles and bodies in leather costumes or dresses and feathers”. This is to be expected, according to Harwood (1999), when questioning gay males in social situations. It is felt, though, that an adequate sample set of LGBT people were found in Denver, as their answers revealed that they came from a variety of backgrounds ranging from lesbian mothers to female-to-male transgender individuals.

Searching out answers for the Denver librarians proved to be a slower process. Initially, a reference librarian was sought out and given a set of questionnaires in hopes that she would be able to be the facilitator within the library system; this woman was a very vociferous and useful information source, speaking on her own experience as a member of the LGBT employees’ group. She was able to pass the questionnaires on to another librarian from another branch, but stated that further than that she did not have the authority to follow up on the surveys. Thus, the main local researcher in Denver went to two different branches and interviewed librarians of various seniority levels. As the local researcher was a former librarian herself, she had the good fortune to be able to network with colleagues and get another branch librarian to gather needed information from further afield; this, finally, rounded out the data with views from different sets of user groups than those found in central Denver.

3.1.3 Training sessions

In addition to analysing the results of the interviews and questionnaires, the researcher attended two meetings/training sessions to get a view of both LGBT awareness training for librarians and the types of topics tabled at an LGBT

social/political meeting. The training class was a voluntary course for Sheffield city employees; perhaps because of its voluntary nature, it could be said to take the tone of preaching to the converted. However, this training course also indicated to the researcher a general idea of how ignorant of the issues those who did not attend such courses actually could be. The course also brought out some topics that were later chosen for the interview questionnaires. The other meeting attended was part of the national LGBT history month events hosted by Loughborough University. The purpose of this meeting was to inform LGBT members of some of the history of political activism and the current and past struggles in this field by the Trade Union Congress. In this meeting, two perceptions were found of particular interest: the first was the fact that most of the LGBT people present believed that had the news media not found the 2004 banning of fox hunting so absorbing, the legislation allowing civil partnerships (and all the rights attached to it) would not have happened due to the influence of media scrutiny. The second observation was in personal interaction with interviewees: Many were quite friendly until they realised that the researcher was not herself a member of the LGBT community, at which point the tone of the discussions often changed dramatically. This poses an interesting problem for other straight researchers looking into LGBT subjects and an excellent suggestion for future sociological and psychological research.

Chapter 4: Results Analysis: Librarians

4.1 Introduction

In designing the questionnaire used in the interviews, it was important that the questions progressed from general background information to perceptions of present services and provision for the future. In the first section, the questions were designed to draw out what the librarian thought their library's general user background was, how the library acquired input from the users and what the written documents were that could influence service provision. The second section of questions was designed to investigate what specific materials were provided for LGBT people, whether they were provided for differently than other minority library groups, how the stock was distributed and the different access points that were available to LGBT patrons – with emphasis on those provisions for LGBT users who are not comfortable with asking a librarian for help. Finally, librarians were asked about their perceptions regarding the promotion, training and outreach efforts made by their libraries. When examining the questions (see appendix A), it may at first seem that there could be the opportunity for some repetition of answers; this was done in the hope that respondents might be prompted to add more detailed information as they thought of it. In practice, however, this did not always happen; it was felt by the researcher that some of the participants were already nervous about their interview and thus became confused or rushed in their answers.

4.2 Sheffield Librarians

The respondents for Sheffield were from two of the 27 city libraries; this was due to the library facilitator's choice of staff he believed would be useful for the research project. Additionally, these two libraries also contain the LGBT collections of Sheffield's library system. It is unknown if these nine people volunteered for the interviews or were actually chosen, though it is suspected in all cases but one that it was the latter. Fortunately, though, the respondents came from all seniority ranks and represented the typical gender ratio for librarians – seven females and three males. Unfortunately, due to technical problems, one interview was lost and another was made up exclusively of the historical background of creating the LGBT collection in Sheffield. The historical background did give the researcher a glimpse at the processes that went into creating the LGBT collection though and this interview is discussed later when describing the set-up and provision of materials specifically for LGBT people.

4.2.1 Users' background and influences on stock policy

From the description given by many of the interviewees, there is quite a range of people amongst which LGBT patrons could be 'hidden'. Among those listed are a half a dozen different ethnic groups – each with different language needs – older women, children, students, refugees and asylum seekers, and, more recently, the younger working-class people who are interested in Sheffield's People's Network. Each of these groups has its own set of materials that they wish to see on their public library shelves. Like libraries in many cities, Sheffield's branches try to reflect the distribution of the

neighbourhoods in which they are located, with the central branch providing the basis for the rest of the city. However, if the distribution of the LGBT collections is anything to go by, there are few regions in the city that feel the need to cater to LGBT patrons; the entire system's allocation of LGBT material is condensed into display in two of the twenty-seven library branches in Sheffield. Also, unlike many of the other collections in Sheffield, LGBT materials are not circulated around the city. This may be, as one librarian suggested, because it was felt more useful to have two extensive collections rather than one or two books in every library. This librarian also mentioned that there are some LGBT materials with more mainstream topics that are therefore in general circulation.

The LGBT materials that Sheffield libraries collect are presumably influenced by the library's materials selection guideline document, which was last updated in 1994 and originally produced sometime in the 1980s. However, quite a few of the lower-seniority librarians that were interviewed were not even certain that there were materials selection guidelines for the Sheffield system. As for other documents, such as the governmental regulations mentioned above, only the city's equal opportunity document and the UK's equal opportunity employment law were mentioned by interviewees as specific influences on the library's service to LGBT patrons.

Those librarians interviewed did say that new purchases in all collections were influenced strongly both by the requests of the patrons and by circulation (popularity measurement) figures. One main library staff member summarised the feelings of many others in reply to the question regarding whether or not users have an impact on materials acquired:

“Yes and no. We try to provide for everyone, but requests affect our choices quite a bit, especially as we have had a larger materials fund lately. We are stocking things also for ethnic stuff that might not be used, but think that the library should stock. Examples of things that they are stocking because they think they should rather than requests or circulation are leftist, Irish, and LGBT material. Things can be extrapolated across the base.”

As this librarian noted, materials funds are also a big factor as to whether or not a library can afford to respond to patron requests. In the 1990s, said one interviewee from Highfield branch participant, there was one year when there simply was not a materials fund. Materials funds for new purchases in Sheffield in 2000/2001 were only £237,000, but in 2004/2005 were in excess of £1.5 million (Sheffield City Council, 2004). Understandably, this lack of funding in the past had drastically cut down Sheffield’s buying power for LGBT stock. One interviewee who was on Sheffield staff during the late 1980s and early 1990s stated that the city’s entire LGBT collection had been bought in one go during an “Opening the Book” campaign. During this time, quite a few LGBT books were being published because it was a new field for publishers; the original collection that was placed at Upperthorpe and Highfield libraries reflected the opinions of some 30 LGBT people who were brought together to discuss the selection of documents and how they would be displayed. Since that time, one of the main library interviewees stated that there had not been more than five or six LGBT books bought for both libraries each year. She considered this statistic “shameful”, and suggested that it was obvious why the existing selection of (now dated) LGBT books did not circulate well.

However, with the expansion of materials funds, there may be signs of change. As one interviewee related, there is currently an effort being made to discover the

current information desires of LGBT people in Sheffield. This effort is being made not only to find out what LGBT people would like in their library but to discover reviews and new and established publishing sources not known to Sheffield librarians. However, according to a regional manager, this does not mean that LGBT material, or any other material, will be easier to select unless specific requests are made. This manager also discussed how a large proportion of stock selection consists of guesswork on the part of librarians, primarily because buying lists often contain little more than the title, a short blurb describing the book and perhaps cover art. Because of this, she said, the library had traditionally stuck with reviewed publishers, publishers known for publishing in certain genres or subjects or authors whose work was fairly predictable. She also stated that for most non-fiction, the library did not buy before they could have it in hand because patrons were more willing to wait for non-fiction than for fiction titles. The concern by this respondent, as well as some of the other staff at Highfield, was that some non-fiction, as well as fiction, related to gay males was quite graphic in nature; as they had been having some trouble with non-LGBT novels of a similar nature, they thought best to be cautious about what materials were selected. The impression received, especially from frontline staff, was that new LGBT material was considered a waste of money because it had such low circulation numbers. However, as some staff members at the main branch suggested, nervousness or social pressure might encourage LGBT users to simply read the material at the library and not check it out at all.

At present, the primary means for LGBT users to suggest library improvement are through leaflets that allow library users to comment on services or request items. Oddly, none of the interviewees mentioned that there are online forms for requesting

books, making suggestions for buying materials or commenting on service. In response to the researcher's query as to the impact of user needs on library collections, besides mentioning the leaflets and asking a librarian to purchase a book or get the book via interlibrary loan, a few did mention that it was possible to reserve for a fee a book that was out on loan. What was not said – and what may not be clear to casual users – is that it is possible via the Internet to request an item, and be notified of when it has been bought or requested through interlibrary loan, without paying the fee. This may be good news for those who are reluctant to speak with their branch librarian, as they do not actually have to come into direct contact with a librarian for their request. However, from a few overheard conversations among patrons in the Sheffield central branch, it seems that the library has not adequately publicised this fact, as many still believe they must pay and reserve a book or to have it purchased for the library. Other than the publicity given to leaflet format there seems to be no concrete evidence for the reservation leaflet/fee combination as being more effective than the online equivalents, as with both services the patron is guaranteed a response to their query, including whether their suggestion has been acted upon and when a suggested book is ready for pickup.

4.2.2 How are LGBT patrons provided for?

“It is difficult ‘cause there are two small collections in two libraries and keeping those collections live ... there may be an issue there. People ask for new material and new things to read, but with a small collection it is difficult to meet their needs. With that small of a collection, it is difficult to keep someone's interest for long. You need quite a lot of material to keep them busy and for whatever reasons, like budget or distribution of resources, you can't meet everyone's needs.”

This statement by one interviewee reflects some of the problems that even the most sympathetic library system must deal with. A library cannot be everything for everybody, which is why both Sheffield's materials selection policy (1994) and their 2004 position statement talk about prioritisation. Keeping this in mind, many of the interviewees, when speaking of LGBT collections, emphasised the fact that these collections were not specifically for LGBT patrons, but rather for any library user. Any LGBT material bought, especially during funding shortages, must be justified against the whole collection. As adequate funding has just been acquired in the past few years, it might be expected that stock and support systems such as catalogues or bibliographic lists will lag behind national service levels.

Since the money for stock has not been present, and LGBT people are just one of the interest groups for which Sheffield must cater, it might be understandable that some interviewees, when asked about LGBT material, would start off by saying it was not their area of expertise and that they could only guess at opinions and rationales. However, once that disclaimer was given, interviewees went on to suggest that Sheffield's LGBT materials consisted of a segregated section of fiction materials, some non-fiction materials and perhaps some society listings at the Information Department; several interviewees mentioned that there might be some newspapers at the central library that had survived the system's purge of material in the 1990s. Also mentioned by two upper-seniority staff members was the Edward Carpenter collection, located in the archive section of the library system; this material is named for the gay socialist thinker and author of 'The Intermediate Sex' (GLBTQ Inc., 2002). However, in all cases, the exact number or nature of the materials provided for LGBT people was

unknown by the interviewees. When asked about how evenly the LGBT items were distributed amongst the subdivisions of this minority group, no one was willing to venture definite answers; however, many ranked gays, then lesbians, as the biggest groupings, with traces of bisexual and transgender books mixed in. As a visual estimate, there are approximately seven shelves of fiction material in both libraries, adding up to an estimated 300 fiction books. Also of note is the local LGBT newspaper Shout! (not to be confused with the social group of the same name). The researcher was also told that the Pink Paper was now back in production and held at the central library. As for non-fiction, even rough numbers are unknown due to Sheffield's policy of integrating LGBT non-fiction with the rest of the library's non-fiction collection; as stated earlier, even simple searches on Sheffield's computerised catalogue failed to yield many results.

The cataloguing process for materials in Sheffield's library system has not been cross-referenced, meaning that the subjects and other data about materials is not keyword searchable. Because of this, users must know the title or the author of an item to receive more than a few responses to keywords such as *lesbian*, *gay*, *bisexual* or *transgender*. This does not pose a problem to those users who already know what they are looking for; however, as confirmed by at least one of the LGBT interviewees, many LGBT people are unaware of what material exists and are unsure of how to start searching. For those who do not have home Internet access, or those who live with unsympathetic family members, even finding material on the Internet can be difficult; because of this, many young LGBT people are likely to seek information at the library. When asked how a LGBT patron might find out what information is available at their local libraries, most of the interviewees responded that users can either search the online

catalogue, browse the stacks or ask a librarian where the material is located. Asking a librarian can be useful, but assumes a lack of fear on the user's part and the fact – not always true – that the librarian queried is aware that on the non-public side of Sheffield's catalogue, all LGBT materials are listed under the subject heading of *lesbian and gay collections*. As mentioned above, browsing can be useful when searching through the segregated LGBT fiction material, and perhaps even non-fiction or magazines if the user has the patience to look through all the stacks; however, this also assumes prior knowledge that Sheffield's LGBT material is located only at the central or Highfield branches. To make matters more confusing, the central branch's Web site does mention that it has lesbian and gay collections, but Highfield's site does not. Regarding the online catalogue and the inadequacy of keyword searches, this was acknowledged to be a problem for first-time or timid LGBT users by three respondents; one stated that she discovered this issue after she had tried her own search from a public terminal. The other two interviewees mentioned a feature called 'Select a title' in the online catalogue designed to bring up the titles of works in a specific subject area. However, if this feature does exist it is not readily visible on the online catalogue, and the librarian in charge of 'select a title' admitted that the list was not up to date.

The librarians interviewed were also asked about other access points that might be useful for LGBT people and whether or not there were any regulations pertaining to minors checking out LGBT material from Sheffield libraries. One of the suggested tools mentioned in "Sexuality: the New Agenda" (2003) was a bibliographic list of LGBT materials, regularly updated and made available to the public. While a fully functional version of the 'Select a title' feature might be an example of this, it has not been updated

recently and there are no bibliographic lists for any group. However, one or two respondents did state that, if asked, librarians could print out for users a copy of those materials listed under lesbian and gay collections within the non-public section of the catalogue. Another way in which LGBT people might find relevant materials is through being able to see what items can be borrowed from other libraries via interlibrary loan; however, this feature was not found at Sheffield libraries.

One final way in which LGBT people might find out about the availability or existence of LGBT materials in Sheffield libraries through is public promotion by the libraries or their affiliates. Keeping this in mind, the librarians surveyed were asked how their libraries promote LGBT stock, or how they would do so if they had the opportunity for change. One respondent remembered that at one time, there had been a display of LGBT books in the Highfield branch, but that almost no one went near the display; as a result, Highfield placed the collection in an area not as visible and circulation improved slightly as a result. Another interviewee remembered that in the 1980s, there was limited promotion of LGBT books when they first were bought and set out as a separate genre; this coincided with the library's display of a petition to have nullify Section 28. Most respondents, however, said that Sheffield libraries simply do not promote collections actively. Several suggested that it was unfortunate that LGBT material was not displayed like the 'quick picks' or books by known authors more readily visible in libraries. When asked how Sheffield librarians could better promote the LGBT collection, some ventured that they would use any posters or flyers sent to them by LGBT groups or produce a Web site that may be more effective than displays or posters. However, more than one librarian surveyed stated that there was no need to

promote LGBT materials ““cause those that use it know it’s there”, or that one part of the library’s holdings should not be promoted individually but the library collections as a whole should be promoted. However, the last sentiment might be contraindicated by the suggestion that Sheffield libraries do not promote any of their stock very well, as demonstrated by the fact that only 21% of Sheffield’s population in 2001 were active library users (Audit Commission, 2001).

In terms of increasing library usage, this reported lack of well-publicised resources might prove to be fatal for young LGBT people, particularly as they are more likely to feel socially stigmatised than those already comfortable with their sexuality. Studies showing that LGBT youth have around a 35% attempted suicide rate indicate that it may be extremely beneficial for young patrons to have easy access to positive images of people like themselves (Cant 2002). Studies like the ones described in Cant’s work, as well as the concern expressed in a dissertation by researcher Anne Currant (2001), prompted the inclusion in this project’s questionnaires of interviewees’ opinions on youth access to LGBT material. However, as none of the interviewees mentioned youth or young adult books on LGBT topics, the researcher assumes that there were none available, or at least none known to the librarians questioned. Unlike their American counterparts, librarians at Sheffield are as a rule more cautious about allowing young people to check out LGBT material. Most respondents said that it was up to the discretion of the person checking out books as to whether or not it was allowed. The two frontline librarians interviewed – those with whom young LGBT readers would be coming into contact – were concerned about parental disapproval and the fact that as children’s library cards do not accrue fines, such books would not be returned. One

respondent also ventured that children should have to state reasons for checking out any adult material, LGBT or not; if the book was to be used for school, she said, she would allow the minor to borrow it. It must be noted that requiring any library user to give a reason for checking out any material that is not illegal could easily have the effect of discouraging young users from checking out any responsible reading.

4.2.3 Looking to improve future service

It might be that frontline staff at Sheffield libraries have not, under previous budget restrictions, been able to receive sensitivity training in LGBT issues; however, with a current £44,000 training budget that allows all employees at least five days of training, this may change in the future (Sheffield City Council 2004). One respondent, a central branch librarian, stated she had seen plans for LGBT training to be integrated with other sensitivity training in 2005. When interviewees were asked if they would find LGBT training useful for their work, some stated opinions similar to “courses are always useful, always something that can be used”. Others said that sensitivity training might be useful, but that they do not have any problems addressing patrons as they treat them all the same. As all of the librarians pointed out that all training is voluntary, it might be suggested that very few who would attend LGBT sensitivity training unless they were directly in charge of dealing with future LGBT outreach programs. Additionally, as Vincent suggests, voluntary training in LGBT matters is often a matter of ‘preaching to the choir’ (Vincent, 2005).

In addition to training, one way suggested in the background literature of serving LGBT patrons is to establish an outreach programme to these individuals, perhaps

through partnerships with area social or help group venues. However, when asked about the relevance of outreach programmes in determining LGBT needs one clearly vexed interviewee said, “It’s not my job – anyway, we have no outreach programmes for anyone”. Others were more moderate, stating they did not know of any outreach programmes; one librarian from the central branch mentioned that she had seen a plan for liaising with LGBT groups in 2006.

Finally, interviewees were asked for any additional information that should be included as part of their perceptions of serving LGBT users. It was thought by one librarian that Sheffield libraries should display more LGBT material, regardless of what patrons in general might think of it, in an effort to counteract materials being passed over by patrons or disposed of due to disuse. She suggested that LGBT materials be displayed in the same manner as any other groupings of books – orange-label ‘literary’ books being used as an example – and shelved with other materials so that casual users could pick up and enjoy materials they might not otherwise consider.

4.2.4 Conclusions

During the interviews with Sheffield librarians, respondents were asked about whether they believed their libraries have treated the provision of LGBT materials differently to those focussed on other minority groups. All those interviewed said they thought that LGBT patrons were being treated the same as any other minority. One respondent, however, did suggest that it might be thought that blacks and Asians received extra attention in library provision because part of the budget is set aside each year exclusively for serving those minorities. He explained that the reason for this

separate allocation was solely because Book Scan, a minority group supplier, requires Sheffield libraries to commit a certain amount of money each year, and that amount must be secured against other drafts. During 2003/2004, £32,000 was budgeted for community language and multicultural materials (Dutch, 2005). The total ethnic minority population of Sheffield is 8.8% of the city's population. If the number of LGBT residents stated by the Sheffield City Council's LGBT Officer Group (2005) is, in fact, 10%, it might be argued that the libraries could justify spending a similar amount of money on LGBT materials.

In Sheffield's case, time and money are needed if the library system's LGBT stock is to be improved to match the quality level seen in other libraries around the UK. It is possible, with the new materials allocation that the library has gained, that Sheffield might even achieve the accolade given to programmes in Brighton and Hove. It is acknowledged that the Sheffield system has suffered years when funding has not been favourable, and it will take a while for these libraries to catch up with the rest of the nation. However, as indicated by interviews, it could be suggested that if Sheffield libraries had more staff who felt responsibility for LGBT users, collections and access points would improve as well. Already, there are hints that the library is following these trends by planning to improve its cataloguing system in the near future, as well as joining the city's training programme "Value on Diversity" (which includes LGBT training); in addition, according to interviews, libraries have started communicating with LGBT community groups on how to improve service. Keeping these actions in mind, it can be concluded that while LGBT service in the Sheffield libraries may not be ideal at present, they are working towards a future of better service.

4.3 Denver Librarians

Interviewees from the Denver Public Library system (DPL) came from four of the city's 23 library branches. The geographic distribution of these libraries was fortunate, as it reflects several distinct socio-economic sections of Denver. Among these interviews were four from DPL's central branch, which is located in the affluent downtown Capitol district. Four more were gathered from the Blair-Caldwell branch, a new library with an emphasis on the culturally diverse backgrounds of the Denver area. One was taken from Cherry Creek, one of Denver's most affluent neighbourhoods, and one was received from Schlessman, an area of younger families and people from Africa and Eastern Europe. All but two of the interviews were achieved by the local researcher visiting the branches at various times and asking for volunteers to participate in the study. The other two were contacted via requests made by library personnel to Schlessman and Cherry Creek employees. It must be noted, however, that six of the Denver interviewees indicated through their answers that they themselves were part of the LGBT community as well as being librarians. It is the belief of the researcher that while this may not give a wholly accurate picture of the average DPL employee, it does represent a good mixture of various levels of seniority, and the answers received reflect a group of librarians who would be knowledgeable and enthusiastic about service to LGBT patrons.

4.3.1 Users' background and influences on collections policy

The user backgrounds of the Denver librarians were much more descriptive and diverse than those provided for by Sheffield librarians, even though the cultural and ethnic makeup of the two cities is roughly the same. The majority described their patrons as being African-American, Hispanic or white in the two central Denver branches, but the breakdown of patrons differed somewhat in the suburbs; Cherry Creek's patrons, for example, were described more as a homogenous strain of middle- to upper-class whites. However, interviewees also went on to describe library users through other social labels, such as "homeless", "international", "business people", "poor kids", "cultural", "linguistic", "sex class" and even "well-to-do condo yuppies". Also mentioned by one respondent - something that was never suggested in Sheffield, was a description of Denver's 'large' LGBT community (a guess of 2.5% of the population), their prominent participation in the city's annual Pride Festival, the presence of three local LGBT newspapers, an active community centre and local organisations and businesses that cater to the LGBT population.

Keeping such responses in mind, the GLBT user base was perceived as being very influential on the materials acquired by Denver libraries. This does, however, have some potentially negative effects; it was lamented by one librarian that many users do not want books or other learning material most of the time, instead seeking out entertainment media such as DVDs and CDs. This may be, in part, because the Denver system loans out multimedia materials for free (as opposed to Sheffield libraries). Another contributing factor may be that Denver administrators are promoting (maybe over-promoting, as stated by one respondent) electronic books and other new media

materials over more traditional items. Regarding collections policies, many of the Denver librarians interviewed emphasised that the library usually bought what was requested if it could not be found in other branches or through Prospector, the regional catalogue for public and academic libraries. One librarian commented that Prospector was particularly useful to the Denver system because it meant the library did not have to purchase materials that were of such an academic nature to become low-circulation items; instead, they could be easily obtained from local universities. The librarians interviewed usually qualified their opinions of catering to public demand by saying that those items requested by the public must be balanced against the library's mission statement and collection policies so as to build a diverse and enduring collection.

However, according to one librarian,

“... the over-arching philosophy of collection development is ‘give ‘em what they want’. This is based less on what readers ask for than what selectors think they ask for. By buying popular materials in quantity, we boost circulation, thus ‘proving’ that we’re meeting our readers’ inchoate needs.”

Within the Denver system, there are a multitude of methods library users can use to suggest the provision of new materials. Forms are available at the library for users – or librarians, if requested – to fill in. Patrons can send requests via post, or call them in to the library. There is also a purchase and interlibrary loan request form available online in both English and Spanish (the most prevalent alternative language in Colorado). However, it must be noted that the link to this request form is only found after clicking on a small ‘comments’ icon at the bottom of the main DPL Web site – not the easiest item to find for a new or inexperienced user. Finally, also encouraged are requests via e-mail with links given to an amazon.com or similar Web page showing the

library exactly what the user would like to receive. To make certain that the patron who requested the materials is contacted when the material has been purchased, accessed via interlibrary loan or denied, the patron's name and library card information are taken. Patrons can also check the 'My Account Details' section located on the DPL Web site. Finally – and as a thoroughly different means of acquiring stock – several Denver respondents mentioned that patrons are welcome to donate their own books to the library, with the clause that DPL has the final discretion as to whether or not the material is accepted.

Most librarians interviewed were not aware of any governmental influences that might affect service to LGBT patrons. Several mentioned that the city of Denver holds a non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation and gender identity; the same concepts can be found as well in Clause 3 of DPL's non-discrimination policy. These statements were unconfirmed as the only statement of non-discrimination policy found was the fact that the State and DPL were Equal Opportunity Employers (EEOC, 2005). Colorado's Amendment 2 was mentioned in some interviews as a factor in discouraging LGBT provision, and some thought that because they worked in smaller Denver branches, they might be fired because of the homophobia in those libraries. Even after the repeal of Amendment 2, one interviewee commented that it did not prevent some librarians from being homophobic, offering as an anecdote how one suspected lesbian librarian found a homophobic pamphlet on her car after parking it in a car park only open to library employees. Because the majority of LGBT materials are located in the central library, as well as the LGBT library employees' committee, it could be suggested that better support mechanisms and overall acceptance might be more prevalent in the

central branch. Other than these factors, though, the librarians interviewed suggested that there are few influencing documents or censoring influences in Denver, particularly notable as the city is located in a politically conservative Republican state – with the exception of one employee, who said, “I imagine that our selectors practice a form of self-censorship with respect to sexually explicit materials, although they have bought things that have made me worry about complaints from the prudish”.

4.3.2 How are library patrons provided for?

When the Denver librarians were asked about the materials provided explicitly for LGBT patrons, there was an explosion of answers. One respondent summed up the primary LGBT materials list as:

“non-fiction and literary anthologies, sociology, history, politics, science, health, sexuality, queer studies, religion, biographies, arts, sports, education, etc. We have a nice collection of practical sorts of things like coming out, relationships, family issues, financial and legal guides, pop-psychology self-help, travel. The videos are mostly popular movies, but also documentaries and foreign films.”

Other librarians added to this list with LGBT society pamphlets, CDs and DVDs, business brochures, bookmarks endorsing LGBT titles, magazines and newspapers subscribed to by the central branch, material on parenting skills, young adult and children’s LGBT collections and a variety of online visual databases provided for both teens and adults. The library also occasionally puts on LGBT film festivals, book discussion groups, musical performances by GLBT choruses and author events featuring such notables as Armistead Maupin and Jewelle Gomez.

This is not, however, to suggest that every library within the DPL system has all of these resources to hand. One librarian describes that while the acquisition of LGBT

material is fairly even-handed, traditionally materials for libraries other than the central branch have been allocated on the basis of user profiles, thus placing books of lesbian and gay interest in selected neighbourhood branches – even though Denver does not have a ‘gay ghetto’ to justify these branch selections. While there may be some LGBT books available in most of Denver’s branches, the majority of supplementary materials such as magazines, pamphlets and videos are located at the main branch. This seemingly random placing of LGBT materials at sites around the city can potentially be a problem for those who are unable to get to the central branch. However, with the ease of use of Denver’s interlibrary loan system, this poses less of a problem than it might first appear.

Furthermore, the interlibrary loan programme and the integration of LGBT materials into the general are not as much of an issue in Denver as in Sheffield due to the former city’s adoption of a highly effective cataloguing protocol. While it is true that most of Denver’s cataloguing has been outsourced to publishers and suppliers, the library’s own cataloguers add cross-referencing terms for LGBT (and other) materials that might be specific to DPL or otherwise left out by the supplier. Because of this, it is comparatively easy to find large amounts of relevant LGBT materials using simple keyword searches. Also, according to interviews, it was considered years ago – though no specific date was given – whether to keep LGBT materials separate from the rest of the collections, whether to use stickers to identify LGBT material and whether to remove material that portrayed LGBT people in an unfavourable light. Eventually, according to the interviews, all of these ideas were rejected; it was considered that a full spectrum of opinions was necessary for historical archiving, and that the specific

identification of LGBT materials (either through separation or labelling) might encourage vandalism or shunning by some patrons.

As for the issue of minors accessing LGBT material, it is generally seen as a non-issue within the Denver system. Although it is acknowledged that some parents might object to their children being granted access to LGBT material, DPL's collection, library card and Internet use policies all state that it is the parent's responsibility, not the library's, to assure children are accessing appropriate material. This is reflected by the fact that there are LGBT books in the young adult and children's sections of the Denver system, though in some branches the young adult books are placed in the adult section. There also has been produced a printed bibliography of LGBT material for teens, as well as an online resource page geared towards teenagers.

Additional information access points are provided for LGBT adults as well. In addition to Denver's keyword-friendly catalogue, the library offers printed bibliographies with suggested search terms and suggested Web links for a variety of subjects. However, GLBT Web sites are catalogued within their general subject areas; for instance, gay travel guides are located among travel sites and Lambda literature award nominations are listed along with other literary award information. In all LGBT material, a balance between the category's subgroups is sought by DPL librarians; for example, one of the bibliographies features seven featured male authors, seven female and one transgender person. In the interviews, several librarians admitted that there were few materials on bisexuals and even less on transgender and transsexuals. However, one librarian interviewed asserted that she had simply not found for purchase many materials published by or about bisexuals and transgender people, and that she

was reasonably certain all the major works in this category had either been purchased by DPL or were available via Prospector.

Finally, it was suggested that face-to-face interaction was welcome via the Denver librarians. If a patron is not confident about speaking to a librarian in person or over the phone, there is also a feature on the DPL Web site called Smartypants, a service where patrons can converse live with a library employee 24 hours a day. This service can be used by patrons both at home and at the library; users are prompted for a nickname, their postal code and the question they wish to ask. The library employee converses with the user on one side of the Smartypants screen, and sends and displays Web sites on the other side. Additionally, after the session is finished, the system provides a session code so the patron can access the answers and Web sites displayed during his or her conversation with the Smartypants operator. It should be mentioned, however, that at times the operator is unable to assist with all queries, and may occasionally direct users to an individual branch of the library.

4.3.3 Promotion and looking to the future

As mentioned earlier, DPL does much to promote GLBT causes and materials, including film festivals, bibliographies, author talks, bookmarks, Web sites and other resources. Librarians interviewed also stated that they offer general book displays within the branches, as well as more substantial displays during Pride Month in June and National Coming Out Day in October. Additionally, a group of librarians march in the Pride parade every year and have a booth at which they distribute information. Various LGBT events being held at the library are promoted via notices or flyers placed in local

LGBT newspapers, coffee shops and bookshops, as well as on the LGBT librarians' Internet list serve. Within general library displays, some respondents said they tried to arrange showcased literature on racks near non-fiction sections where LGBT items are prevalent. One librarian said that she tries to place LGBT books in the "staff recommends" section and writes book reviews to be posted on the DPL website. Other promotional and outreach activities by individual librarians include presentations to LGBT staff groups at other city agencies and non-profit organisations, brainstorming meetings with LGBT librarians from other cities or states participation in state-wide Gay Chamber of Commerce activities. One librarian mentioned participation in an AIDS walk, Denver's annual Martin Luther King march and work with kids at Rainbow Alley, the community centre for LGBT youth.

Considering this sizeable amount of promotion, it might be excusable to assume that LGBT sensitivity training was not necessary within the Denver system; however, as stated earlier, many of those interviewed were LGBT themselves and thus not fully representative of the overall librarian population. In fact, some of the non-LGBT librarians surveyed suggested that LGBT-specific training should not happen in Denver for political reasons; it was suggested that training money should not be spent on LGBT-specific issues, or that because all training is voluntary, those who need it most would not go. However, opinions varied widely one LGBT librarian interviewed argued that sensitivity training should be made mandatory and perhaps integrated with the required diversity and multicultural training because frontline staff, not librarians, should be educated to be sensitive towards all patrons' unique needs.

Additionally, though many of the activism activities outlined above could be considered outreach programmes, the librarians interviewed suggested that there was no longer any formal outreach or partnership collaboration within the Denver system and many of those activities mentioned above were taken on by individual employees rather than by DPL itself. At one time the Gill Foundation, a gay/lesbian civil liberties charitable fund, made a single donation of \$50,000 specifically for the purchase of LGBT material in Denver, but other than that one deal, say interviewees, outreach programmes have been primarily informal. Some formal efforts have been made, such as attendance by DPL librarians at the state-wide LGBT librarians' conference, but it was felt by interviewees that this effort was a waste of time due to the event's focus on academic, not public, libraries.

Finally, the Denver librarians were asked for any further comments not outlined in the rest of the questionnaire. Several librarians believed that the service provided for transgender and transsexual people was of very low quality, and that transgendered and transsexual users needed more information and understanding from the staff at DPL. One of the librarians had this to contribute: "As a lesbian librarian, I am grateful for all the good materials and services provided – it is a very welcoming place. But I think that the library could do a better job of letting people know that there really is something for everyone here."

4.3.4 Conclusions

Looking over the Denver librarians' activities, it might be argued that the amount of LGBT involvement seems too good to be true. This may be due to a general climate

of funding fear: As mentioned above, the budget for the DPL system is to be cut a further 1.5% from a budget already lower than it was five years ago. This has caused a reduction by 30% of the materials fund, as well as changes in some libraries' operating hours and, in some cases, staff (DPL, 2005a). Thus employees may over state the capabilities of DPL fearing cuts to the LGBT programmes. This funding shortage could also partially explain the fact that that many of the Denver system's bibliographic lists have not been updated in some time, and many non-book or non-standard LGBT materials are available only at the central branch or via interlibrary loan. Also of note are the wildly divergent opinions of sensitivity training held by various Denver librarians; to rationalise this, it might be necessary for the library to incorporate LGBT training into standard employee training. It would also improve overall knowledge of LGBT materials if a formal outreach programme was established with area LGBT community centres and perhaps local schools' gay/straight alliance groups. All in all, though, the Denver system enjoys the positive effects of enthusiastic employees, a general climate of civic support and extensive online and in-house representation of LGBT material.

Chapter 5: LGBT Users

5.1 Introduction

When designing the questionnaire used in this study, it was hoped that the research could be conducted by means of face-to-face interviews whenever possible. While one of the Sheffield interviews was conducted in person, it was made clear quite quickly that for data collection within the Sheffield LGBT group one would have to depend on the anonymity of the Internet and the help of a familiar counselling group leader; for the Denver group, local researchers would be vital for collecting in-person interviews. For these reasons, the questionnaire was kept short and questions simple enough that they might be easily delivered by the facilitators with a minimum of background explanation. The LGBT questionnaire (see appendix B) prompts for the respondent's basic background library usage, their present needs as a LGBT library user and the outside information sources and library improvements they see as necessary in the future. The results are analysed below; the first section summarises the basic frequency with which the library is used, typical subjects for which the library is used and how users perceive basic environmental quality or ease of service. The second section moves on to LGBT users' specific needs, how these needs might change with age or psychological development and how LGBT patrons would like to have information displayed and accessed. The last section discusses the types of access points LGBT patrons use, whether library sources or otherwise, as well as users' perceptions of whether libraries should incorporate sensitivity training, partnerships with LGBT groups or additional expansions to their LGBT subject matter.

5.2 Sheffield's LGBT Patrons

The LGBT respondents acquired in Sheffield were from three different groups and responded in three different formats. The only live interview came from a member of the University of Sheffield's LGB Student Committee; while this interview was a bit strained due to the nervousness of the interviewee, it did reveal a good face-to-face perception of interviewee reaction and a reminder that some of the questions could have two equally valid, if opposing, answers. As stated earlier, the facilitator for Shout!, a gay and bisexual male counselling group, felt it would be more effective if he administered the questions himself in written form. As could be expected from the form of delivery, most of the 12 sets of answers from Shout! were fairly brisk and short, particularly because questionnaires were distributed at the end of a meeting; however, one respondent did take the effort to type out answers that were clearer and much more lengthy. The final set of eleven respondents were members of the online lesbian group Something In Sheffield; nine included complete answers and two stated that the respondents do not use the library. These interviewees, with the exception of the non-users, were as a rule verbose in their responses. The fullness of their answers may have been due to the anonymity of the Internet, but could also be explained by of the friendly and accommodating atmosphere that the researcher found when conversing with this group. In all, these three different interview and answer formats yield a wider picture of the responses garnered by such potentially sensitive questions – which may in itself be a useful item of guidance for librarians looking to establish LGBT outreach groups. Also,

because the answers represented three distinct categories of LGBT users –students, social groups and a counselling group – a well-rounded picture was achieved.

5.2.1 Library usage and environment

Like most library users, the LGBT interviewees stated they use their public library in a variety of different ways and with varying frequency. This also reflects the varied backgrounds and special needs of these people in addition to their requirements as LGBT patrons. For example, one interviewee stated she only received material once a month because she is disabled and has to use her library's homebound service; another patron elaborated on her search for information on the difficulties of being a step-parent in a same sex relationship, rather than what she described as the more "usual" information on insemination and rearing young children. Thus, the answers received from Sheffield LGBT patrons say that they come into the library anywhere from twice a week to once in 20 years!

When queried about the materials they most frequently request or use, replies were varied, but the most frequent users were those who were students or who had a specific subject in mind. Some of these respondents stated they came to the library looking for Internet access, medical texts, poetry, art history, biographies, books on sociology and history and stress and relaxation studies; others sought out novels, newspapers, reference items and travel information. This diversity of desires may explain the large variance in statements of how easy library material was found; one interviewee stated she found the information she needed only 30% to 40% of the time. However, it must be noted that some of the LGBT respondents displayed

misconceptions about their public library. One stated that even though she knew her belief was “wrong”, she continued to harbour the thought that libraries do not have useful, relevant or up-to-date material on LGBT topics. This statement was affirmed by one of the Something in Sheffield respondents: “I think it is a good service, but it has its limitations. It often feels a bit stuck in a previous time, although Sheffield libraries have tried to change this.”

When discussing how comfortable they personally felt with the public library and its staff, results were decidedly mixed. Several stated they were quite comfortable, and listed only general complaints such as not having enough seating for readers; one interviewee spoke of not being able to reach materials on high shelves due to her disability. It must be noted, however, that those respondents that said that they were comfortable with speaking with the librarians and requesting LGBT items also commented that they were very comfortable with their sexuality. Other respondents stated that they felt a bit uncomfortable in the central and Highfield branches standing in an area that was clearly marked ‘gay’. One interviewee stated that she might feel uncomfortable asking for help on LGBT topics at the central library due to the open layout of the library and the fact that she might be easily overheard. One man commented that he had not been to the library in a long time because after searching the non-fiction section of the library he could not find anything that would help him with coming out and discovering who he was; in the end, he decided his only option was to learn through day-to-day life. Still others stated that when they first started searching for LGBT material, they found it difficult to find things in the library catalogue but did not want to ask a librarian; in these cases, the librarian was familiar with the patron’s family

or church, and they could not risk being outed by the librarian. In a similar vein, some – though they admitted the opinion was based only on assumptions – thought that frontline staff would be closed-minded regarding their sexuality and needs, and they decided not to risk the feeling of disapproval that might come from asking about LGBT books.

Those respondents who did make a practice of asking Sheffield librarians good-humouredly reported that even though the librarians often admitted their collection was poor and they did not know where to find the material sought, they would often show them to somewhere or someone who could help them find their items.

5.2.2 Changing LGBT needs and distribution of stock

After examining the background literature, the abovementioned findings of patrons could be considered fairly typical and to be expected. These findings also demonstrate that in time LGBT patrons' confidence levels change; those who are more comfortable with their sexuality are better able to find material or ask for it if they cannot find what they need. Those who are not as confident with their sexuality are the ones who need more assistance or guidance from librarians, but are often unwilling to expose themselves to find it. In order to investigate this matter further, the interviews included questions on how the LGBT users perceived their changes in information needs, if any, over time and if they would prefer any alternative means of access to the materials they desired. In doing so, interviewees were asked if they knew that they were gay at a young age. Many of the respondents replied in the affirmative, though the ages of awareness varied considerably; many knew in their teen years, but some knew as early as ten and some acknowledged only in their early twenties that they were gay.

Most of the respondents did not or could not give a specific age, suggesting that like most changes in life, knowledge of one's sexuality comes gradually into ones consciousness; this was confirmed by one interviewee who said the coming-out process took at least three or four years. All respondents said it would have been helpful in their own coming-out process to have access to positive information to help them understand who they were, what it meant or simply that they were not alone:

“I knew I was gay from a very early age, but lack of any reference point that there were other gay men contributed to the suppression of my sexuality for a considerable amount of time.”

“Yes, and I felt completely isolated. I hunted down literature on what it all meant and especially where I could meet other people like me. In the small town environment I was in [a mining town outside Sheffield] I spent my teenage years thinking either I was ‘the only gay in the village’ or that girls just weren’t into me. I used to walk around with pink triangle badges on, almost wishing for a sticker to put on my head ‘hey, I’m gay, are you?’ Completely inept I was!”

“It would have been tremendously helpful and beneficial to my mental and physical health if I had come across books by and about lesbians when I was a teenager (other than the stereotypical homophobic variety). For a long time I didn’t think that I was gay, I just thought I was mad, and any positive literature would have been helpful. It would have been great to be able to access ordinary novels or non-fiction/self-help that was down to earth and reassuring.”

Such quotes poignantly express the need of LGBT youth to view themselves as ‘normal’ or as part of a group with similar values. Some, if not all, thought that coming-out books or pamphlets would be useful for libraries to provide for younger people. One respondent pointed out that if the violent crime how-to books she had seen in the libraries’ young adult section were seen as permissible by the “stodgy” librarians at her branch, then LGBT material in the same section would be mild by comparison. Other resources suggested by respondents were magazines or pamphlets with questions and

answers about alternative sexuality, as well as information on how to come out to family members or, alternatively, accept family members' sexuality. Other frequently requested materials were novels and non-fiction showing positive views of alternative sexuality, information on gay rights and laws concerning LGBT issues and, most prominently, local social or support groups in the area.

It must be noted that these basic subject requests did not change significantly as the LGBT people interviewed became more comfortable with their sexuality. However, interview responses also suggested that as LGBT people became more comfortable with their sexuality, they need less information about identifying who they are, where social groups were located or what age of consent laws were; later, they became more interested in books on hobbies or fiction materials. In addition, responses pointed to subjects that are of concern to older LGBT patrons, such as health issues, HIV/AIDS awareness or parenting issues such as how to come out to one's children or teach them about their sexuality. Considering this change in materials needs over time, one respondent's remark was particularly valid: libraries have the need to 'future-proof' their selection of LGBT material so that it will not show its age or lose its relevance in five or ten years' time. In all of this, though, it must be remembered that LGBT patrons do not only require 'serious' material dealing with their sexuality. They also reflect the same leisure reading desires as the rest of the population – just sometimes with a LGBT slant.

This balance between LGBT and 'standard' material in patrons' lives is reflected the most difficult question in the interviews: whether LGBT stock should be integrated with or kept separate from the rest of library materials. It should not have been a surprise that most of the respondents examined the question from both angles, particularly as

they became comfortable with their sexuality; many saw both the good points and the bad points of having either an integrated or separate collection of LGBT materials, as well as the balance between having small LGBT collections in most branches or a comprehensive collection in a central branch. Of those who preferred for LGBT material to be kept separate did so on the basis that materials would be easy to find and displayed as something that was not to be shied from or hidden away. At the same time, many thought that for those who do not want to be seen obviously viewing a section of LGBT material, integration would be positive, particularly because heterosexuals might be more likely to pick up a LGBT book and like it – something that would be highly unlikely if such material were kept separate. As one participant said, “If you weren’t particularly comfortable [with your sexuality] then going up to look at it [LGBT collection] might be embarrassing; you might not want to do it or might just not do it.”

Opinions were not so mixed on the merits of distributing materials across libraries or keeping them in a central library. Most respondents admitted that they would prefer a central repository due to ease of access and the possibility that more people might use LGBT material, but only if branches had a quality set of reference materials and a reasonable quantity of fiction. Some believed that a central location would be better because branch libraries are too conservative with their selection of general collections, and having a separate section in every library would only serve to bring out veiled homophobia from frontline branch staff. In all, most believed that it was better to have a top-quality collection of LGBT materials at a central location, but to back it up with a good interlibrary loan system and publicity to make readers aware of the materials’ availability.

5.2.3 Non-library resources, outreach, training, and desired material

Unawareness of material or its ability to be made available through interlibrary loan is a particular problem facing LGBT users at Sheffield. That said, it is worth investigating whether LGBT patrons primarily use the catalogue to find materials, ask librarians or simply browse the stacks to find what they need. Most of the Sheffield LGBT respondents stated that they used the Internet catalogue at least occasionally; for some, it was their primary source, but the same can be said for most computer-literate patrons. A surprise was that several respondents did use the in-library catalogue and/or ask librarians for help – this contradicts the findings of Garnar (2000), who asserted that the library catalogue was among the last places that LGBT people looked for information. Other popular resources included bookstores, word of mouth, reviews in gay/lesbian magazines such as *Diva*, social groups and newsletters from specialist publishers. One source that was particularly surprising – and that might be considered as a future venue for development – was the trade unions. It might be suggested that the Trade Union Congress and Stonewall – two political groups with knowledge of LGBT people's needs – should be among those that the library should try to contact for outreach programmes. When asked about this, the Sheffield respondents were unsure about the structure required of such a project, but were generally positive about partnerships between the library and LGBT groups. Other groups that were suggested were predictably the Shout! Centre for HIV and Sexual Health, various voluntary help agencies and the Sheffield University LGB student groups. One respondent suggested that the library specifically liaise with schools on the topic of LGBT information

distribution. Another suggestion was that the library, instead of posting flyers or similar action, should set up a dedicated Web site detailing all the libraries' LGBT services, a suggestion screen for patron request and perhaps an automatically-updated bibliography. It was emphasised that the site should be separate from the city council's Web sites, as they were considered "tedious and confusing" and not as easily indexed by search engines.

As background reading suggested that librarians can be seen as intimidating and unable to adequately deal with LGBT needs, respondents were asked if they thought training would be helpful for librarians serving LGBT patrons. Some respondents were unsure, or stated that librarians should simply be trained to locate material and address patrons in a respectful manner. Others suggested that librarians and frontline staff should have mandatory training to help them work with patrons from backgrounds than their own – especially LGBT people, as they feel exposed in small branch libraries. One respondent put the need for librarian training succinctly:

"I think it's a question of promoting good practice that is anti-oppressive ... helping librarians uncover their own homophobia (internalised or otherwise) and getting them to examine their prejudices in a non-threatening environment."

Finally, interviewees were asked what LGBT subject areas should be included in their public libraries' collections. This question had the effect both of getting respondents to analyse what they really wanted from a library collection and giving librarians searching for stock suggestions some clues. The topics stated were, as a whole, quite similar to those subjects, concerns and typical library usage topics discussed above: coming out, self-help, parenting and step-parenting, domestic violence,

children's and parents' coming-out issues, female sexuality in general, community information (requested to be placed near the LGBT fiction section, if applicable), mainstream LGBT fiction, bisexual and transgender resources, anti-prejudice material, magazines and newspapers, health, human rights, bullying and homophobia, assertiveness training, poetry, legislative information, civil unions, music.

5.2.4 Conclusions

As demonstrated by the list above, the needs of LGBT patrons in Sheffield are varied, but all stem around achieving an understanding of how patrons' sexuality affects the rest of their lives. Their sexuality is not their sole self-identifier; they have interests similar to all library patrons, and in many areas their use of the library probably follows the same patterns of heterosexual patrons. However, while there is no perfect way of arranging resources to fit the needs of every LGBT patron, it is made clear by interviewees' answers that some effort towards understanding LGBT issues should be made; librarians should not assume that everyone coming into their library is heterosexual. Across the board, interview answers indicated that real improvement of Sheffield's cataloguing system is needed, as well as an overall inclusion of LGBT material in the young adult section and better promotion to the public of resources for all ages. Of all the suggestions for acting on these issues, perhaps the most relevant were co-operation with outside organisations and the establishment of a dedicated LGBT Web site, just as Sheffield libraries have done for other minority groups.

5.3 Denver's LGBT patrons

The number of LGBT participants from Denver – a total of 26 – was the biggest sample set in this research. Unlike the participants from Sheffield, these respondents were contacted at random during a two-day gay pride festival by three local researchers; thus, their distribution among the LGBT categories cannot be guessed. Although attempts at gaining a sample set in the same manner as the Sheffield research were made, this was abandoned after Denver LGBT social and counselling groups did not respond to queries. As stated earlier, one of the local researchers came to the conclusion that most, but not all, participants were female, stating that many of the men approached at the festival were too busy “primping”, were from out of town or did not use the public library. Another anomaly that should be taken into account as an influence on these interviews is that, unlike the semi-formal interviews in Sheffield, those gathered in Denver took place in very informal circumstances; researchers approached festival-goers and asked if they would like to participate after determining that they used the library, were local and had read the introductory material. Keeping that long introductory process in mind, it is actually reasonably surprising that the researchers conducted as many successful interviews as they did. It must also be noted that, due to the informal, face-to-face nature of these interviews, the Denver questionnaires were changed slightly, using instead of descriptive answers Likert scales with ratings from one to five for many of the environmental questions asked. Because of this, the analysis of Denver LGBT patrons is somewhat shorter than that of Sheffield patrons, as some of the detail in the Sheffield respondents' answers was lost with this technique. One benefit that was received by holding these interviews in a social atmosphere is that the researchers were

able to observe various lifestyle details that would not have been present at a more formal interview, such as couples collaborating for their answers or having children present during the interview.

5.3.1 Library Usage and Environment

Looking at the frequency with which the Denver interviewees stated they visited their local library, it is no wonder that DPL's budget report boasts that every three out of four Denver residents have a library card (DPL, 2005a). This response is in stark contrast to the answers reported by the Sheffield users; though the sample may not be entirely representative of all LGBT users, as stated above, the frequency of visits ranged from every two months to four times a week. That said, one of the local researchers also stated that he got the impression from interviewees that many of those spoken to prefer the Internet or bookstores to libraries because these resources were more immediately accessible and, after a visit, the item was theirs to keep. Another notable trend found within the responses was that many of the LGBT people interviewed stated that, when using the library, they were looking for children's fiction when looking for general library materials – not LGBT items. However, there seemed to be a fine line delineating what adult LGBT patrons deemed acceptable for younger LGBT people. On the one hand, many respondents stated that they would have found LGBT material very useful when they were younger; however, many also said that they did not want libraries promoting LGBT literature to youth. This seeming self-censorship may be due to an underlying American sexual conservatism, a fear that negative publicity in the city would be stirred up by these materials or a desire for their children to avoid being

bullied for their choice in library materials. Regarding the choice of adult materials, the mix is fairly similar to those mentioned by Sheffield LGBT people: fiction, non-fiction, periodicals, primary resources, city ordinances, travel, music, and school materials. The major difference between Sheffield and Denver usage is that Denver offers many more Internet-ready computers as library resources; they are the official deposit library for governmental papers, and a significant collection of primary (western American history) sources is catalogued on computers in the central branch.

Most of the LGBT patrons interviewed found Denver's library environment friendly and useful and, for the most part, were not afraid to ask librarians for what they wanted. A few interviewees did mention that when they were younger, they would not have been as willing to talk to librarians, and that they used the library more for LGBT material at this younger age. This may also be a contributing factor to interviewees' statements that they do not use the library very often for LGBT material. However, most did state that when they were looking for LGBT-specific material, they usually found what they wanted – and if they did not, they were able to ask a librarian to order it for them. This statement was also frequently qualified by stating that they found most of what they wanted on the GLBT Web links provided by Denver's library, and through these Internet resources could discover the fact that the library had the material that they wanted. Quite a few respondents commented that finding items on the computer and finding them on the shelves were two different matters, primarily because the Dewey system was “confusing” to them, as well as the fact that and in the Denver system, none of the LGBT material is segregated (unless it is in Spanish or specific to the western American history archive). For the most part, though, most stated that they were able to

find what they needed through the catalogue, Web links or through asking librarians – and, interestingly, there did not seem to be the same distrust of small-branch librarians as found in Sheffield.

5.3.2 Changing LGBT needs and distribution of stock

When queried, many of the Denver LGBT participants said that their mid-teens was the time that they accepted (a dichotomy was often made between *accepted* and *knew*) that they were gay. Unlike the Sheffield participants, none gave a specific age, and their answers indicate that because they had so much exposure to LGBT issues in the media, or in some cases their libraries, they did not have as much of a problem with denying or repressing their sexuality. This is not to suggest that none stated they were not bullied or in need of information on how to come out – simply that most of the Denver interviewees were a bit more confident in approaching people for help or persistent in seeking out materials. One Denver participant who came out as a teenager stated the following topics that would have been useful to him in his youth: “Dealing with parents as a young gay, coming out issues. Found the library [a] very helpful source for when I was young and wondering what to do”. Most respondents agreed that young adult library materials would have been useful during their coming out, particularly material on self-acceptance, gay history and community information. This is similar to what was mentioned in Sheffield; in addition, some Denver respondents remarked on a “desperate” need for transsexual or transgender information, which, as mentioned above, is difficult due to the severely limited transsexual/transgender stock in either city.

The Denver interviewees' responses suggested that as they became more comfortable with their sexual identity, their reading habits changed, too, from self-awareness and coming-out issues to politics, laws concerning gays and health and lifestyle issues. Also, as these users became more aware of themselves and the local LGBT scene, some stated they were not as dependent on the library for their information needs; instead, they tended to look to friends and online political contacts to get more of their information. One respondent made the point that LGBT people must shift with changing social mores, and suggested that for the library, "changes should reflect the new generation and [be] more open [to] GLBT acceptance" in society.

This general progression towards acceptance of LGBT people and issues might be reinforced by the Denver libraries' integration of LGBT material with the rest of their stock. As one interviewee noted, "there is no reason to specify the sexuality" of a book – however, that same person also stated that it was vital for these materials to still be cross-referenced to the subject of LGBT items. As could be expected from this example, there was a considerable mix of opinions on how LGBT items should be arranged within the library. Most responded that these materials should be integrated, often because they felt that there was no need to segregate the LGBT population any more than society already has. A few respondents thought that materials should be kept separate for ease of use and finding, and one interviewee – unlike the Sheffield respondents – thought that by having LGBT materials integrated, they were easier to vandalise because they were not under the careful watch of a librarian. It must be noted, though that the majority of answers in both Sheffield and Denver were strongly influenced by whichever system was already in place: Most Sheffield respondents said

that the materials should be separated in order to establish their significance, while in Denver most stated that LGBT materials should not be ‘ghettoised’ any more than necessary.

Regarding the question of whether LGBT materials should be evenly dispersed among the branches or kept in a central location, the results came out strongly in favour of even distribution (15 answers versus two) – however, even after being posed the question in an either/or format, seven respondents specifically requested “both”. One respondent’s rationale for this request was that while the central library is easily accessible in Denver’s downtown area and therefore should have a base collection of LGBT materials, branch libraries should also be tailored to their constituents and those libraries that have more LGBT people in their demographic should have a better LGBT collection. The same interviewee mentioned that there were also branches where LGBT books were not needed in great amounts, because not as many LGBT patrons existed in these areas. However, as Denver is not home to a specifically ‘gay’ neighbourhood – with the exception of Cheeseman Park, which is itself quite close to the central library – this mode of operation may not work so well in practice. It would, however, be more practical to have a small set of reference books and a selection of fiction in all branch libraries, and the main collection at the central branch – in essence, the existing Denver system.

5.3.3 Non-library sources, outreach, training and needed materials

When asked about the means by which they found LGBT material in their local libraries, the Denver respondents were, on the whole, much more complimentary of their

library resources than those in Sheffield. Most stated that they used the libraries' catalogue and LGBT Web links first, followed by bibliographic lists and non-library sources. Though demographic preference may come into play, this may be explained simply by the larger number of online links Denver provides, as well as the city's three choices of catalogue (DPL-specific, Prospector, and Wildcat) available at the central branch. One respondent even admitted to using DPL's Web links and catalogue before trying search engines such as Google for the same information. However, a few interviewees responded that they looked on the Internet, in bookshops or talked to their friends about finding material before using the library as a last resort. This minority also indicated an opinion in contrast to those who preferred the permanence of buying materials from bookshops: When searching for an item, they sought input from friends, word of mouth, the Web and bookshops, but then went to the library (and even requested the item, if it was not available) so that they might use the material for free.

What, then, are the most utilised resources for those who do not use Denver's catalogues to find their information? As might be expected, many respondents stated they used the Internet for primary research due to the ease of use and wealth of information. It was also mentioned by some that they used the Internet, even in the library, more than other resources, stating that most of the everyday, up-to-date LGBT material is located online and that the Internet facilitates provide easy contact with other LGBT people from around the country. Other non-library resources mentioned in the interviews were bookstores, special interest groups, community centres, online booksellers such as amazon.com, LGBT-specific book clubs and LGBT newspapers or magazines. Unlike in Sheffield, there was no mention of trade unions.

Another area in which the Sheffield and Denver responses differed was in that of outside partnerships. When asked if they thought whether partnerships or outreach programmes involving LGBT organisations would be a positive change, at least half of the respondents said no. However, the rest of the interviewees responded quite strongly, stating that outreach and partnerships would be effective ways of showing the LGBT community that DPL is sincerely trying to serve the underserved. A few of these respondents stated that, while they were hopeful about such changes, they thought that with library budget cuts and the current American socio-political climate, they would not happen. However, some who believed in the validity of library outreach offered concrete suggestions of groups to contact and programmes to start. One suggested that DPL work with local and international gay rights groups to gather unbiased information to help fight discrimination. Others suggested partnership with Denver's LGBTQ Community Center as a means of teaching LGBT youth, as well as a library mailing list or some other means of updating users about new LGBT-related materials. One respondent suggested PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) as a good partner because the organisation works not only with those who are LGBT, but also their friends, family and associates.

In order to adequately facilitate such outreach programmes – or even in order to effectively interact with LGBT patrons on a day-to-day basis – librarians may need some special training. Again, many Denver respondents expressed reserve about the probability of this happening due to funding shortages, but were nonetheless enthusiastic about suggesting different subjects about which library staff should be aware or sensitive. The primary training requests stated were for sensitivity training and a better

knowledge of the library's LGBT stock; also emphasised were the need for a better understanding of LGBT subculture, lifestyle and young adult needs. One respondent went so far as to suggest librarians take a psychology course centred around LGBT issues.

While the psychology course is a bit far fetched the knowledge gained by LGBT training or by conducting outreach programs do go a long way to providing librarians with a sense of the materials that LGBT patrons would like to see in their library. The Denver participants are not much different than the Sheffield LGBT people in that in general they want books about and by gay people for all ages, gay rights, gay lifestyle, coming out, gay travel, cultural studies and history. They would also like to see more specialized material such as transgender material, community information, LGBT event calendars, how to deal with protesters. Maybe even more personal materials such as self help, gay drug abuse, adoption, same sex parents on birth certificates. Basically, information about who they are and their special cultural needs.

5.3.4 Conclusion

While it must be acknowledged that the responses from the Denver interviewees were of a slightly different nature due to the informality of the research environment and the different formatting of several of the questions, it can be observed that the Denver respondents were a more dynamic group overall. However, while these LGBT patrons were more willing to ask for what they wanted, they were also rather conservative when it came to the promotion of LGBT material to youth. Two additional areas of information seemed to be vitally important for the Denver LGBT respondents, though:

the lack of attention given to patrons – particularly transgendered people – by most public institutions, and the need to provide young adults with materials on both straight and LGBT topics in an unbiased way.

Chapter 6: Other information sources

6.1 Librarian training course

Through the researcher's attendance at a Sheffield Information and Training Organisation (SINTO) training seminar on the topic of LGBT cultural awareness, it was hoped to gain a better perspective of what benefits are to be had by librarians attend similar training courses. The facilitator of this half-day event was John Vincent, a noted scholar and activist on various social inclusion issues including gay rights.

The first exercise of the seminar illustrated the event's hands-on, personal approach. Participants were asked to name celebrities and other major figures who had publicly confirmed that they were gay; in response, the librarians in attendance gave names primarily from the entertainment field and occasionally from political office. As many of the gay or lesbian people named were actors who were known for 'playing up' on their sexuality, Vincent pointed out that many young LGBT people would not be able to identify themselves with these characters; although these faces are popular, he stated, their lifestyles do not as easily fit into everyday mainstream life. This, Vincent stated, is where libraries can be of help, presenting to LGBT people books and other media that more accurately represent their feelings and desires whilst allowing patrons to identify with positive images and stories.

Another exercise during the event was to read transcripts of potential library dialogues on LGBT material and decide how one could better react to such situations. In this activity, the participants were faced with difficulties that they might encounter, involving both the public and fellow employees; this had the effect of pointing out that

problems involving LGBT issues and materials can come from other staff in addition to patrons – and that frontline staff members’ prejudices can be a particular concern.

The third and final activity proved the most enlightening. Participants were given a set of questions to answer concerning government regulations and laws that might affect LGBT people and the libraries that serve them. It amazed many of the long-time librarians in attendance just how much information they did not know about relevant legislation. According to Vincent – who drew information from UK government documents, including Sheffield government sections such as the LGBT Multi Agency Group (Sheffield City Council, 2005a) – this revelation was particularly important, given the public libraries’ responsibility to provide a better service for the 1 in 10 Britons who are gay. Overall, the training session seemed relaxed, thorough and effective, and after analysing the responses both of librarians and LGBT users, it can be suggested that such courses are a useful tool in helping librarians recognise issues and sensitivities in the LGBT population and the public at large.

6.2 Trade union awareness of LGBT issues

As mentioned earlier, the researcher also attended an information session as part of Loughborough University’s LGBT history month events. Conducted by Peter Purton of the Trade Union Congress (TUC), this event was informative both via the LGBT information discussed within that session and through the social information gathered by the researcher. Based on the lively discussion that took place during the session, it was possible to gain a feel for the issues about which LGBT groups were passionate, both politically and socially. Among the topics discussed were employment rights, past

injuries and victories achieved by the TUC on behalf of their LGBT constituents. They also spoke of the potential difficulties regarding employment of LGBT individuals in church-run organisations, such as schools; these institutions, Purton stated, could, even under employment equality regulations, discriminate against LGBT people in their employ without repercussions. Also included was a discussion of civil union ceremonies and the rights and privileges that would be accorded to LGBT couples upon their registration as a couple.

Opinions during the event were often strong; on the topic of civil unions, one stated that that this set of rights would not have passed legislation as quickly and quietly as it had if the media at the time had not been distracted by issues regarding hunting with dogs. However, it must be pointed out that, when the researcher asked the group for more information about what individuals were doing to help various political causes, she was mostly met with silence by the LGBT attendees. Had the researcher been instead an individual curious about his or her own sexuality and related issues, such silence could be radically disheartening, and this tendency towards silence under pressure may be a topic for further research – especially considering that one LGBT co-ordinator, when interviewed, suggested that many LGBT individuals are allowing others to fight for their rights without making efforts of their own.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 General Overview

In this study, the perceptions of librarians and LGBT patrons were sought regarding the provision of LGBT services and materials in the Sheffield and Denver public libraries. While there were similarities in the perceptions and concerns expressed by all four sample groups, there were also quite a few differences that were not anticipated at the beginning of this study. The librarians of the two cities studied were similar in recognising that the LGBT population has been an underserved constituent within their libraries, and that there is a need to improve access to and knowledge of LGBT materials, not only among the LGBT population but the general population as well – including themselves as librarians. The differences between the librarians, discussed below, may have been due to differences in their libraries' organisation, or their unique social, political or cultural backgrounds; regardless, the differences in opinion make the case for several suggestions for improving LGBT library services in general. Overall, the LGBT interviewees in the two cities were more consistent in expressing their perceptions of library services and the needs of LGBT patrons. Their differences, though not very pronounced, could again be down to cultural variance. The American LGBT participants showed a greater willingness to publicly display their sexual orientation, seeking out LGBT materials from various resource points (including librarians) and not expressing as much reserve about being perceived as gay within the library. This comparative boldness may not be true for LGBT Americans outside of the library – as indicated by the suicide studies by the American Psychological Association, mentioned above – but certainly compared to the oft-expressed worries of the British

LGBT participants, there is a noticeable difference in these two groups' willingness to approach librarians for information.

In this chapter, the differences and similarities found within the interviews in this study will be discussed, as well as any conclusions indicated by these results. After a cross-sample comparison of the issues brought up in respondents' questionnaires, recommendations for action among the groups involved will be suggested.

7.2 Summary: Librarians

From initial observations of Sheffield and Denver's online catalogues, there was a strong impression that Denver had a much better LGBT collection, both in terms of physical material and online LGBT link suggestions. This impression was confirmed, rather than disproved, during this study. The staff interviewed in each city's library system also reflected this imbalance of LGBT service provision. On the Denver side, there was an enthusiasm for improving stock and services for LGBT users, despite the dampening effect of budget cuts. The Sheffield staff, on the other hand, seemed through their interviews mainly to believe that LGBT user services were not part of their individual remits and therefore not a large priority for their everyday knowledge or performance of library activities. Many expressed the view that the library is for everybody and that targeted efforts should not be made over one particular group, instead prioritising actions that benefit the library collection as a whole. These differences may be partially explained by the fact that Denver Public Library has enjoyed a sustained level of prosperity in the past, especially concerning the Gill grant, which gave the library the opportunity to develop their services to an acceptable level

for LGBT patrons. It remains to be seen if Denver's LGBT services suffer in the future due to the funding cuts of the last several years. Also, those participants within the Denver sample may not be entirely subjective, as more than half of them identified as LGBT themselves. It must also be considered that the Sheffield library system has suffered massive funding shortages over the last 20 years, and the materials fund has only quite recently been recovering to an acceptable level for sustaining collections. As for the seeming lack of enthusiasm on the part of the Sheffield staff, that may be explained simply by their overall lack of knowledge of LGBT issues and, as a result, a lack of perceived ownership of the ideas associated with these issues. As one Sheffield librarian stated, the development and promotion of LGBT issues in her branch would flourish dramatically if there were a LGBT person on staff – there had been one in the past, she said, but none at the present.

7.2.1 General background

The general demographics of Denver and Sheffield are similar both in population numbers and socio-economic makeup. However, whereas Sheffield has significant Asian, Middle Eastern and African influences in ethnicity, Denver's non-white population consists mainly of those from a Latino background (30%), with African-Americans in second place and other ethnic groups having a lesser role. Each city's library system has attempted to adjust their services to meet the needs of the majority of their ethnic groups. Sheffield, for example, offers their Web site in Chinese, as well as a variety of activities and language materials; Denver has most of its relevant documents translated into Spanish and offers a variety of diversity activities specialised to different

ethnic groups, as well as housing special African-American collections in their Blair Caldwell branch.

As for their strategies for working with patron input, queries and requests, both library systems have similarities and differences. They are of course similar in that both make a stated effort to acquire the material requested and try to anticipate the needs of all their users in their material selections – this is a universal trait among libraries around the world, as is having a written collections policy that attempts to preserve the quality and vision of the library over time. One difference, however, is in how the libraries process and encourage user requests; although Sheffield offers users the chance to request or comment upon material both online and in ‘hard copy’ format, only the written format is promoted by librarians. However, Sheffield appears to have an advantage over Denver in feedback regarding requests and comments; the library guarantees the user a letter describing the action taken by the library in response to their request. While Denver does offer, and promote, many more formats in which users can contact the library – e-mail, written requests, multi-lingual forms and in person – the library does not guarantee the user any follow-up from an employee.

In theory, the Sheffield libraries should be very well informed as to how to serve LGBT users, because at least four government guidance documents exist for libraries, museums and archives elaborating on issues of multi-cultural awareness, social inclusion and LGBT matters. In this study, Sheffield’s librarians seemed largely unaware of these documents, stating as relevant documents during interview only that their city council had an equal employment opportunity policy. Denver librarians, while on the whole more aware of legislation and government guidance, were also scattered in their

knowledge of these documents. Although many named past influences on LGBT discrimination laws and their possible influences on library policy, none mentioned, for example, anything about the freedom of speech rights issued by the US constitution; like Sheffield librarians, they also made no mention of the possible influence of their national library associations regarding LGBT users or personnel. It is to be considered whether these omissions were made simply because the librarians did not think of them at the time of the interview, or because these documents and legislation really do not have any perceived effect on librarians' service to their users.

7.2.2 Provision for library patrons

Both libraries provided at least basic materials for LGBT people: fiction, non-fiction, reference materials and at least two periodicals. As stated earlier, the Sheffield libraries keep their LGBT fiction collection separate, while non-fiction is integrated into the rest of the library materials. Because of its position as a low-priority item during times of low materials funds, Sheffield's LGBT collection is comparatively much less extensive than Denver's. While Denver's LGBT materials are integrated completely within its stock, most of the non-book items in the collection are located at the central branch. However, the library also has a substantial online presence, with LGBT Web links and an active LGBT employees' group. Again, these benefits have been funded primarily due to the Gill grant; unlike Sheffield, they have had the resources to provide both an extensive materials collection and the staff time to produce a set of bibliographic lists and a richly cross-referenced catalogue. Both librarian groups, though, believe that their service is good considering their circumstances, both believe that they treat LGBT

services in the same manner as they would any other user group. Finally, as regards provision to minors, both were somewhat conservative; however, while the Sheffield librarians exhibited a bit more concern about what types of material were issued to minors, Denver librarians, while concern was certainly expressed, largely believed that it is up to parents, not librarians, to regulate minors' library use habits. Regarding future funding and its effects on service provision, time will tell what the Sheffield libraries are able to accomplish with an increased materials fund. However, should they chose to improve their LGBT services, it will likely be a slow process, especially taking into account that when Currant (2002) conducted her research in Sheffield, the library was just initialising talks with the city council's LGBT contacts. While Denver has enjoyed years of prosperity in terms of LGBT service provision, recent funding cuts may prove particularly harmful, although it is hoped that the city will be able to maintain its existing breadth and depth of services.

7.2.3 Promotion, training and outreach

While the Sheffield librarians interviewed claimed that they do not do any library promotion work for special causes, this is somewhat of an exaggeration in practice. The libraries do promote various holiday themes, as well as winners of literary awards, 'quick picks' and, for LGBT history month in February 2005, displayed Sheffield city council's LGBT hate crime self-reporting packets for pick-up by users. Denver, however, has considerably more promotional activities, from a booth at the city's Pride festival to author talks, Web pages and individual librarians' efforts – however, one does get the impression from the Denver LGBT interviewees that more efforts need to be

made to promote the activities and resources available. This is a classic library complaint; self-promotion has always been a problem for libraries, which, in the past, have often tended to wait for requests rather than seek out users' needs.

Regarding the need for and validity of LGBT training, both Denver and Sheffield interviewees responded in a similar way: Such training is desperately needed for frontline staff and may be useful for all library employees, but training in both cities is voluntary and thus unlikely to happen at any consistent level. Strikingly, none of the librarians interviewed in either city were aware of any LGBT-specific training offered by their library, nor where they might go for this training. In terms of resources, too, training offers a conundrum: While both sets of librarians would benefit from training such as that offered in Vincent's SINTO training, frontline staff are usually spread thin enough without having to attend training that is not perceived as expressly needed.

Unlike training programmes, outreach efforts between the two cities are quite different. Sheffield may be in early steps of developing outreach programmes, though this has progressed in the last three years from simply talking to the city council to contacting Shout!, a local gay counselling group, and laying plans for adjusting their catalogue to accommodate LGBT keyword subjects. Outreach programmes by Denver are much more significant but somewhat scattered, ranging from film events, book clubs, and participation in festivals and similar events to the individual efforts of library employees who seek out other employee groups. While their efforts are commendable, it may be that a more concerted effort at forging cross-institution alliances – perhaps with the city's LGBTQ Community Center, schools or other concerned authorities – would be a positive move for promoting LGBT material in Denver.

7.3 Recommendations: Libraries

While the following lists are by no means exhaustive, they may prove useful as a starting point for addressing inequalities and inconsistencies in both cities' library systems.

Sheffield libraries

- Consider examples set by the Brighton and Hove libraries' extensive efforts for LGBT patrons, some of which are described in their document "Out on Loan" (Norman, 1999).
- Make a more consistent effort to publicise the Sheffield libraries' existing LGBT resources in various formats, including community centres, LGBT newspapers, and online resources such as Stonewall.
- Design a library Web site devoted to LGBT materials only, including listings of special collections, the locations of these collections and a bibliographic list of LGBT materials that is automatically updated when new items are entered into the catalogue.
- Provide training for staff regarding the unique social and lifestyle issues pertinent to LGBT users. As LGBT training may not be specifically chosen by staff, it should instead be integrated with other mandatory training.
- Ensure that LGBT users know that their input is important through holding regular social events aimed at their constituency.

Denver libraries

- Promote LGBT items more regularly than at isolated events such as Denver's Pride festival. In order to convince LGBT users that the library should be their first choice of information provider, a more concerted effort at promoting the variety of LGBT materials on offer is needed.
- As suggested by a considerable number of interviewees, make an effort to improve items of interest for transgender and transsexual users.
- As with Sheffield, integrate LGBT-specific sensitivity training into the required diversity training.

7.4 Summary: LGBT users

It was thought at the outset of this research that the LGBT users in Sheffield would be quite similar to those in Denver. Throughout the research this assumption was mostly confirmed, despite the different means used to contact participants in the two cities and the variance in social formality in the interview format. Based upon the similarity of the respondents' answers, any differences between the sample sets are felt to be due to the varied cultural backgrounds of the LGBT people interviewed, rather than as a result of the methods used to collect their information.

The similarities between the Denver and Sheffield sets were primarily centred on the different stock selection needs of LGBT patrons during various periods of their personal development. Another similarity between the LGBT patrons – which may also be extrapolated to be valid around the world, at least in information-rich countries – was

their use of the Internet, rather than their local library, as a primary source of information.

The primary difference between the two groups was in how comfortable they felt with proactively seeking out information. As a whole, Denver patrons were much more willing to be vocal in their demand for LGBT tailored materials; in fact, only one Sheffield respondent said that they had contacted the library in regards to having an LGBT book purchased. The Sheffield LGBT users seemed considerably more sensitive to the prospect that some would feel uncomfortable with being seen handling LGBT material or asking a librarian for LGBT material. This may be explained in part by the fact that the LGBT collection in Sheffield is located only in two branches, and is relegated to separate stacks clearly labelled 'Gay'. Also, a lack of keyword cross-referencing in Sheffield's catalogue makes it very difficult for the user to know if items are available or not without asking a librarian and, perhaps, being exposed. Denver LGBT users do not have this problem, and this added user-friendliness of the city's catalogue is evident in the Denver interviewees' answers.

7.4.1 Background Usage

According to the results of the patron interviews, Denver LGBT people use the library more often and have a particular interest in LGBT items being provided to young adults. Sheffield LGBT users expressed an interest in a wider variety of subjects, but feel that they are not served adequately. Responses indicate that Sheffield patrons are often intimidated by the open-plan, easy-visibility architecture of libraries; many also commented that because many Sheffield libraries have a 'small town' feel to them, it can

be particularly uncomfortable to ask frontline staff for help on LGBT issues. While the Denver users did not make this complaint as often, and reported a general ease of use with the library's catalogue, patrons from both cities reported that they found it difficult to find their material on the shelves. Both groups also felt – even despite Denver's superior provision in LGBT materials – that the stock presented by their libraries could do with updating, especially current-events items.

7.4.2 Changing needs and distribution of stock

Both Denver and Sheffield LGBT interviewees stated that knew they were gay at a young age, and both said they would have found materials on coming out, self-discovery or self-confidence extremely useful at the time. While Sheffield's LGBT patrons suggested that their information needs, though still involving the library, had changed after coming out or through becoming comfortable with their sexuality, many Denver users felt they had less need for the library's GLBT materials as their familiarity with their sexuality progressed. There were, of course, exceptions; some Denver interviewees stated that their interests had not waned, but simply changed from self-awareness to more political and social issues such as parenting and health. However, it was the Sheffield patrons who expressed the greater variety of LGBT interests over the course of their lifetimes.

The LGBT interviewees from each city disagreed considerably on whether LGBT materials should be integrated with or separate from the rest of the stock, leaning towards approval of whichever system was used in their particular city. However, it must be noted that each city's group disagreed on this item even among themselves.

Items of agreement with regards to the distribution of LGBT material were that the stock should be better developed, the location of materials should be well advertised to straight and LGBT patrons alike and that there should be a greater variety of items on transgender and transsexual issues.

7.4.3 Non-Library resources, partnerships, training and collections

While Denver LGBT patrons used the library catalogue and Web links far more often than their Sheffield counterparts, both stated that they would look to non-library resources first for their LGBT information needs, particularly those regarding current events. For both groups, the Internet, followed by word of mouth, LGBT publications and bookshops were the most popular non-library choices. Two unique choices of non-library resources in each city were trade unions in Sheffield and book clubs in Denver.

As stated above, there were similar doubts between both groups as to the viability of libraries forming partnerships with outside agencies; however, both freely suggested alliances including local LGBT advisory centres, university student groups and LGBT newspapers, particularly as a source of community survey input. The Denver interviewees, in particular, expressed interest in co-ordinating with local and international gay rights groups in order to provide unbiased information. Sheffield LGBT patrons, in particular, suggested liaisons with public schools and the creation of a LGBT library information Web site separate from the city council's site.

Both sets of LGBT respondents firmly stated that training librarians to be sensitive to the needs of people with different backgrounds than their own was a positive move. Both Sheffield and Boulder interviewees acknowledged that LGBT people have

a unique lifestyle and cultural background, and providing (perhaps mandatory) training on these issues could effectively lower the prejudices found in both library systems' frontline staff. Sheffield's LGBT patrons emphasised that this training should be presented in a non-threatening way in order for librarians to confront their prejudices without being judged by their supervisors or peers. Denver LGBT users expressed more doubt than their Sheffield counterparts about the actual viability of training library staff on LGBT-specific issues, primarily due to budget cuts in the Denver system and a political climate that does not at present favour using taxpayer money to introduce sensitive topics.

7.5 Recommendations: LGBT Patrons

Denver LGBT patrons

- Request LGBT items for your local library more often and more consistently in order to demonstrate that there is an interest in this material.
- Take an active role in your library and, whenever possible, try to use the public space provided by many libraries for organising LGBT events.
- Make specific requests and suggestions to library staff, particularly involving creating new online resources; such action makes librarians more aware that a need exists, as well as keeping them from 'guessing' about how to fulfil such needs.

Sheffield LGBT patrons

- Use all of the means of requesting items – not just the written format promoted by the library – to make suggestions and comments, so that LGBT issues are not passed over when determining new materials allocations.

- Communicate with the library and librarians, using whatever means you are comfortable with to make staff aware of LGBT users' needs – although LGBT materials already exist in the libraries, this research demonstrates that few librarians are experienced specifically in this area.
- Put LGBT social events pamphlets up in the spaces provided by the library. Advertising your presence will be helpful for those who need to know you are there, and will also build exposure among library staff.

Chapter 8: Further Research

This project in no way examined all the issues that are of current interest regarding the interaction of LGBT people and their local libraries. As the matter is a timely one, and so little research has been produced on these topics, further examination is certainly needed. In addition to the suggestions raised above, several other topics for further research follow:

- How should public libraries and schools co-ordinate to prevent bullying and provide unbiased information about LGBT people?
- How can libraries help LGBT users who, by virtue of belonging to several minority groups, suffer from dual discrimination?
- What are the different information needs and information-seeking behaviours among lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered individuals, rather than simply the umbrella designation of LGBT?
- Would integrated or segregated LGBT stock be more beneficial to the majority of LGBT and straight users?
- What online materials and subjects do LGBT library patrons use the most?

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Appendix A: Interview Schedule for Librarians

General library policies

1. What kind of backgrounds are your users from? (ie what sort of groups do you think make up your user base?)
2. From your observations, do you think that your library's user base has a direct impact on the types of material (paper and electronic) that you acquire?
3. Does the library authority have a written stock management policy?
4. How important do you think contributions from library users are in helping with stock selection?
5. What form would contributions and suggestions from users take?
6. Are you aware of any national government, local authority, or your library authority regulations or guidelines that would influence the library's service to LGBT users?

LGBT servicing questions

1. What type of material does the library provide to support LGBT information needs?
2. To what extent do you believe that the library treats the provision of LGBT material any differently than other minority group?
3. How does your library currently cater to the needs of the LGBT community?
3a Are there different types of media provided? (books, videos, magazines?)
4. Do you think that current provision for LGBT users is sufficient in your library?
5. Does your library have a designated LGBT collection?
5a. If yes, how long have you had it? If no, do you think there should be one?
6. Do you know how evenly the LGBT stock is distributed between the four groups within the LGBT designation?
7. How is your LGBT collection displayed/stored in your library?
7a. Is the collection integrated, separate, both or closed stacks?
8. How do (would) you promote your LGBT collections?
9. How can a LGBT user determine what stock is available?
10. Do you know how easy it would be for them to find LGBT material via your online catalogue?
11. Do you have a bibliographic list of materials available within the system or a way for them to find material for interlibrary loan?
12. Do you have any guidelines regarding the supply of LGBT material to minors?
13. Does the library authority have any training initiatives in place that help staff for to serve LGBT users? If not, to what extent would you find training in this area of use to your work?
13a. Do you think that training in this area should be mandatory?
14. Does your library have an outreach program or a partnership with another institution to determine the needs of the LGBT communities?
15. Is there any other subject that you don't feel I have covered that you would like to discuss?

Appendix B :Interview questions for LGBT

1. How often do you visit your public library?
2. What type of material do you usually use? What type of material do you usually need?
3. To what extent do you think the public library provides the information you need?
4. How comfortable is the library environment for you?
5. When you visit the library how often are you looking particularly for gay literature?
6. Have you ever had to ask a librarian about gay literature? If so did you find the library staff friendly and helpful?
7. Are the materials in the library useful or do they need to be changed? If so how?
8. How easily can you find all the information you need?
9. Did you know that you were gay at a young age? If so what literature would you have found useful?
10. Have your information needs changed? (From when you first thought you were gay until you were out or comfortable with your sexuality?)
11. Should gay materials be integrated with the rest of the stock? Or as a separate section? Please explain your answer.
12. Should collections gay materials be located at the central library or evenly distributed through out the branches?
13. How do you find the gay materials you need? Catalogue, library person, bibliographic lists, or from non-library sources?
14. If you don't use the library for gay related material what information source in particular do you use?
15. Do you believe the library could better serve your needs as a gay person by forming partnerships with outside groups? If so which ones?
16. What specific training do you believe should be included for librarians in helping LGBT patrons.
17. What subject areas should be included in LGBT collections