

Creating Safe and Inclusive 2SLGBTQIA+ Spaces in the Public and School Libraries

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About the Presenter

- Youth Community Engagement Librarian at the Prince George Public Library
- Bisexual since his late-teens; "came out" at the age of 28
- Strong advocate for LGBT2Q+ rights and information access for youth and children
 - Focus on research conducted during MLIS degree; specialized in Public Libraries with a focus on Children's & Youth Librarianship
- Guilty pleasures include video games, playing Dungeons & Dragons, and making fun voices while reading my daughter stories



Creating safe & inclusive spacing for LGBT2Q+ Youth



- "Safe space programs help raise awareness about LGBTQ issues, increase support of LGBTQ students, it helps LGBTQ students feel more safe [sic], valued, and it instills in them a sense of belonging" (Oltmann, 2016; Ratts et al., 2013)
- Libraries can be this foundation, and in turn, an exemplar for other public spaces and schools
- However, when working with the LGBT2Q+ community in our schools and public libraries, it is vital that "inclusive" does **not** mean 'accentuating' or 'othering'

Your Role as the Librarian

- For all children & youth, regardless of gender or orientation, librarians are one of the **safest** adults in their lives
- We do not pose as a “threat”, but rather a middle-ground between peers, family & teachers/administrators
 - We cannot ‘directly’ contact parents and/or potentially out a child/youth
 - We are someone who is seen during periods of relaxation/leisure or fun class visits
 - We create & upkeep a specialized space unlike the classroom, the school’s hallways, or the household
 - One that is safe, inclusive, and a haven away from everything else



Spacing in the Library



- For youth, creating inclusion & safety within the library = making a space where they can talk, work, read & relax freely
- For LGBT2Q+ youth, signs of inclusion and safety must be more about subtle cues
- A simple first step to show you offer a safe space is to display a Rainbow Flag in the window
 - Provides a quiet, yet obvious message to LGBT2Q+ youth that this is a space of acceptance regardless of sexual or gender orientation

Spacing in the Library



- Book displays:
 - Create inclusion in the library by introducing students to the LGBT2Q+ community and key persons in various socio-historical contexts
- It creates a sense of normativity within the library & school environment about LGBT2Q+ topics; students see a narrative with books as just a narrative

Spacing in the Library



- Game collection:
 - Board games, tabletop games (e.g. *Dungeons & Dragons*), and/or video games in your library encourage creative outlet and sharing lived narratives amongst teens
- *Dungeons & Dragons*, in particular, is a great game for youth to engage with while exploring their own personal identities
 - Allows for experimentation with elements such as gender, naming, and personality in a non-threatening/game-centric environment
 - Other players in the party simply view the *experimentation* as part of the game's narrative

Spacing in the Library

- The more exposure youth get to the library, the more they will see it as a safe place
- This exposure can come in many forms: classroom visits, lunch-time & after-school programs, school clubs, outreach events
- The goal for any program in the library should be creating & fostering a sense of community (Vaillancourt, 2012)
- A Queer-Straight Alliance (QSA) is a great program to host in the library
 - It allows student direct exposure to LGBT2Q+ materials in the collection
 - Promotes the library as a welcoming, stigma & judgment free space
 - Shows that the librarian is an advocate for the LGBT2Q+ cause



Spacing in the Library

- With repeat lockdowns due to COVID-19, virtual spaces are vital to have
- Virtual spaces expand the reach & impact of QSAs, and other LGBTQ+ friendly programs
 - Meets the needs of rural youth to attend more urban-centric programs
- Creates a shared space for youth to talk & discuss lived experiences *with* the moderation of a safe adult



Building an LGBT2Q+ Collection



- A strong LGBT2Q+ collection helps youth in “coming out”, understanding what are queer norms, and how to form their own queer identity (Garry, 2015); as well as understanding the LGBT2Q+ community’s history
 - I.e. The more variety of materials with a broader range of orientations, the more LGBT2Q+ youth can see beyond the heteronormative and begin to see themselves; and/or youth, in general, have a greater understanding of their LGBT2Q+ peers

Be Bold & Push Boundaries!

- Easier to do in public libraries than school libraries; however, you need to take into consideration the community you are serving
- For some children & youth, the LGBT2Q+ materials you bring into the library are the only materials of this kind they have access to
- For school librarians, especially, this means ensuring your materials are age-appropriate, but also providing valuable and fact-checked information for youth to learn from
 - This might mean more 'mature' subject matter (vs. "playing it *too safe*")



To Rainbow or Not to Rainbow the Materials?

- There is ongoing debate about whether to label or not to label your LGBT2Q+ collection
 - Ask yourself, are you labelling a genre preference or are you labelling a person?
- Some suggest LGBT2Q+ materials should **not** be labelled with rainbow stickers; however...
- Labelling your materials can be a great opportunity to involve your school/library community
 - Approach your QSAs, your student body, your Teen Advisory Boards, and ask them what they would like?
 - Create a contest to have students create what *they* think should be the LGBT2Q+ label (repeat every 3-5 years)

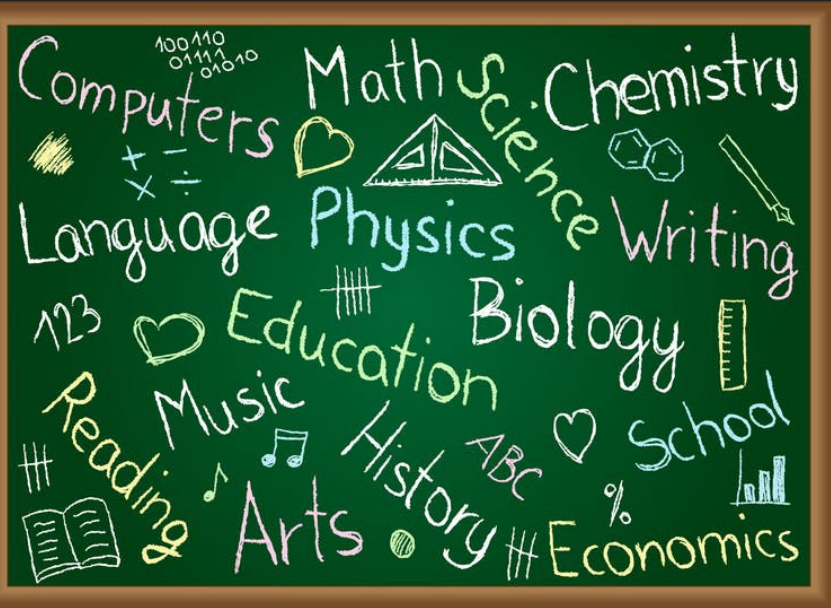




Poll Time

How do you approach labelling LGBT2Q+ materials in your library?

Subject Headings: Keeping Ahead of Status Quo



- When building your LGBT2Q+ collections, cataloguing your materials *appropriately* is vital
- Mislabeled collections can easily lead to lack of usage, community backlash, or stigmatizing the materials for children & youth
- Keep up-to-date on your subject headings & ensure that appropriate headings are used
 - Ex: “Gay” or “Gays” vs. “Homosexual”
- University libraries (such as [Yale](#)) provide great subject heading resource guides to draw inspiration from

Building an LGBT2Q+ Collection

- When building an LGBT2Q+ collection, take note that some sexual orientations – including asexuality and pansexuality – are less represented by mainstream publishers and booksellers
- It may be necessary to reach out to more independent resources
 - E.g. Indie bookstores or self-published LGBT2Q+ authors who write age-appropriate materials
- Little Sister's Book & Art Emporium, a cultural institution in Vancouver, BC, is a great example



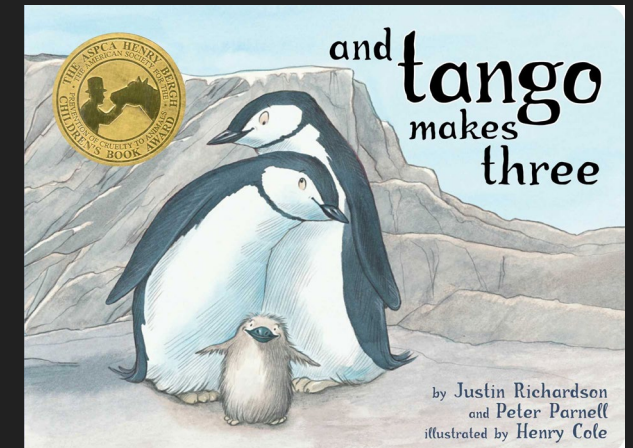
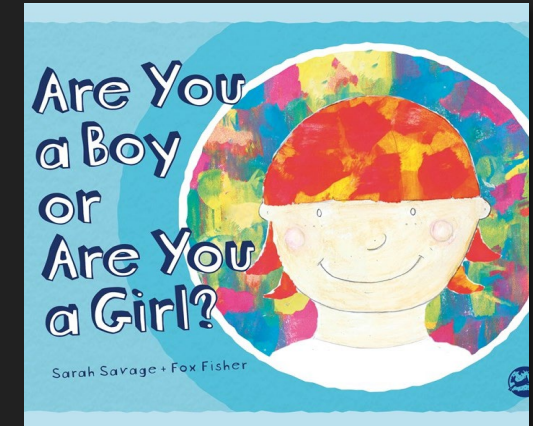
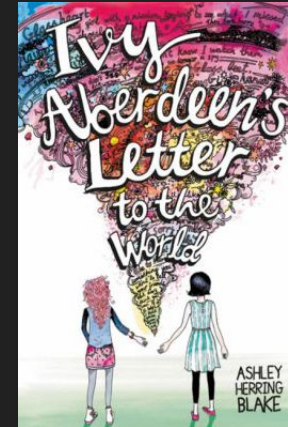
Building an LGBT2Q+ Collection



- Deselection is a key necessity in developing a relevant and appealing LGBT2Q+ collection for youth
- When working on deselecting & weeding outdated LGBT2Q+ materials consider the following:
 - Usage
 - Content
 - Language**
 - Accuracy
 - Superseded**
 - Age**
- ** = especially important considerations

Building an LGBT2Q+ Collection

- Research conducted (Lester, 2013) on LGBT2Q+ children's materials argues that introducing children 12 and under to these materials helps better solidify their sense of **family** and **self**
- This cultivates:
 - an alternate, non-heteronormative perspective of the world
 - acceptance of all people, regardless of their colour, class, or self-identify through the diversity of children's literature (Lester, 2013)
- Portrays various family compositions and acceptance of non-traditional families of all kinds
 - I.e. Non-traditional becomes traditional



Building an LGTB2Q+ Collection

LGBTQ Pathfinder A Resource Guide for Parents of Children Ages 7-12

SAME-SEX COUPLES/FAMILIES:

The Misadventures of the Family Fletcher Series

Dana Allison Levy, 2014-2016.

Following the adventures of a family consisting of two dads, four adopted boys aged 5-12, a pet dog and an imaginary cheetah, the *Misadventures of the Family Fletcher* series follows the adventures of this zany and unique family as they try to make their way through a school year in one piece, deal with a grumpy next-door neighbor and try to plan a way to save their favourite summer hangout, the lighthouse.

This is a great story to include in a collection as it portrays a typical family gay family orientation with two dads and their adopted sons, while also providing a sense of entertainment and humour to the narrative that will appeal to a young reader. This book is ideal for ages 8-12.



Saving Montgomery Sole

Mariko Tamaki, 2016.



Monty is a 16-year old girl who runs a Mystery Club with her best friend; however, she also faces the challenge of homophobia at school in regards to her two lesbian mothers and her gay best friend, Thomas. What will Monty do to try and find balance in her life and stand up for what she believes in most?

This book would be a great addition to a collection as its by a Canadian author and explores the personal effect of homophobia on a character who is influential in age to a younger reader. This book is ideal for ages 11-12.

- **Self-censorship** must be closely watched
- Personal bias can directly influence children & youth's understanding of sexual orientation and what the binaries and non-binaries of society are (Garry, 2015)
- Regardless of personal or community beliefs, ethical standards in the field of librarianship enforce that **equity of access to information** exist for *all* patrons (Garry, 2015)
- LibGuides or general subject guides on library websites offer indirect access to information for youth without risk of “outing” themselves – particularly useful for providing access to information on sexual health

Building an LGBT2Q+ Collection

- As the LGBT2Q+ genre has gained in popularity, especially in YA literature, book-talking the newest materials to connect youth with narratives reflective of their own lived experiences is key (Parks, 2012)
- Book-talking new materials, or highlighting key LGBT2Q+ authors throughout time, helps create greater comfort & reassurance for LGBT2Q+ youth as it normalizes the queer lived experience (Bridges/CBC, 2017)
 - Book-talking (and book displays) during various themed months, not just Pride Month, also creates greater awareness and normalization without 'othering' or 'outing' LGBT2Q+ student in schools (Robinson, 2016)



Internet Access: To Filter or Not to Filter?



- The Internet = a medium of information access that bridges gaps in a library's physical collection
 - e.g. asexual and pansexual materials
- For many LGBT2Q+ youth, the Internet is a safer medium of information access than the library and potential face-to-face discussion with other peers and/or adult-figures
- Offers a degree of anonymity for youth who have not “come out”
 - Youth are at a sensitive and volatile moment in their lives
 - Queer youth can have access to others who have had or are living a similar experience to themselves
 - Youth can have a space to question, learn, and (potentially) “come out” at their own pace

Internet Access: To Filter or Not to Filter?

Unfiltered access should come in the form of allowing access to sexual & body identity, orientation, and health information (without restricting search terms such as “sex” or other sexual body part related wording).

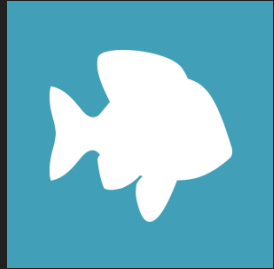
More importantly, open access to forums and blogs allows youth access to advice from others with shared lived experiences as them



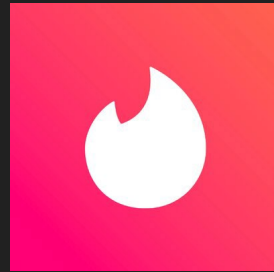
THE ASEXUAL
VISIBILITY & EDUCATION
NETWORK



Internet Access: To Filter or Not to Filter?



- While completely 'unfiltered' access can be problematic, having 'smarter' internet filters with a larger search term lexicon and expanded website availability is necessary



- Teaching digital literacy skills can also mitigate concerns about Internet dangers
 - Exploitation & unwanted advance/soliciting
 - Pornography
 - Basic informational fact checking



- Our roles as 'teacher' & mentor only exist within the library space; outside of it, youth are accessing a multitude of online websites & apps meant for adults to learn about sexuality
 - Including Tinder, Grindr, and Porn Hub, amongst many others
 - Unfortunately, these websites/apps place students at higher risks for mental, physical, and sexual health dangers

The Importance of Language: Body & Spoken

- Libraries are a neutral ground: access to *all* information is available without judgement or stigma
 - **Verbal** and **body** language needs to reflect this means of change
- Language and gender pronouns play a key role in the LGBT2Q+ community, where heteronormative language prevails
 - E.g. “he/him/his”, “hey guys...” vs. “hey folks”
- Being mindful of appropriate, gender-neutral language in the library space can encourage youth who use the space to reevaluate their own language usage
 - Including the use of “they/them” or fully gender-neutral pronouns such as “zie/sim/zir/sis” (University of Wisconsin, 2018)

The Importance of Language: Body & Spoken

1	2	3	4	5
(f)ae	(f)aer	(f)aer	(f)aers	(f)aerself
e/ey	em	eir	eirs	eirself
he	him	his	his	himself
per	per	pers	pers	perself
she	her	her	hers	herself
they	them	their	theirs	themself
ve	ver	vis	vis	verself
xe	xem	xyr	xyrs	xemself
ze/zie	hir	hir	hirs	hirself

Retrieved from <https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns/>

The Importance of Language: Body & Spoken

- LGBT2Q+ youth are more likely to be sensitive to perceived body language, particularly negative or judgmental body language
 - Self-awareness is paramount
- Positive body language can include:
 - Open hands/arms to convey open personality during reference interviews
 - Warm vocal tone that conveys enthusiasm and interest
 - Warm facial expression – does not contradict vocal tone
- Remember that body & verbal language are key to LGBT2Q+ youth, regardless of direct or indirect interactions





Poll Time

How do you convey yourself when talking with children/youth patrons?

Branching Out of the Library: In Schools

- **Booktalks** challenge heteronormative standards in schools & public libraries
 - Provides knowledge to teachers & students about queer cultural capital & LGBTQ+ skills sets
- Use novel study units or one-time book talks
 - Creates better understanding and incorporation of LGBT2Q+ materials into classroom studies
 - Contextualizes materials within the LGBT2Q+ community without “othering”
- If teaching staff are hesitant to incorporate LGBT2Q+ in their classrooms, short, in-library novel studies are an alternative; public library visits/story-times can also be of benefit
 - Provides youth with the opportunity to adopt alternate, non-traditional perspectives of society
 - Picture books are great for these book studies; ideal for Pride Month (June) or LGBTQ History Month (October)

Branching Out of the Library: Community Resources

- Incorporating community resources for LGBT2Q+ youth within the library allows youth to learn from/hear about first-hand lived experiences (Steck and Perry, 2018)
- Provides librarians with a means of bridging gaps in either physical or online resources available within the library, and by expanding on generalized knowledge of LGBT2Q+ related information
- With any LGBT2Q+ community resource, in schools, school guidelines should be followed
 - Provide students & parents with waiver forms & exemption if against personal or religious beliefs
 - Avoid animosity between school and its community + creates positive environment around LGBT2Q+ inclusion

Branching Out of the Library: Additional Resources

- **Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN)** (available at <https://www.asexuality.org/>)
- **Atlanta Office of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion** (available at <https://atlgbtq.atlantaga.gov/home>)
- **BCTF Social Justice: Social Justice Resources** (available at <https://bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=17992>)
- **Bisexual Resource Center (BRC)** (available at <https://biresource.org>)
- **City of Atlanta 2018-2019 Biennial Report on LGBTQ Affairs** (available at <https://atlgbtq.atlantaga.gov/assets/files/BiennialReport.pdf>)
- **Georgia Equality** (available at <https://georgiaequality.org/>)
- **GLBT Roundtable** (available at [Rainbow Round Table \(RRT\) | Round Tables \(ala.org\)](#))
- **Pride Education Network** (available at <http://pridenet.ca>)
- **University of Georgia Pride Center** (available at <https://pride.uga.edu/>)

LGBTQ+ Book/Media Resources and Awards

- **ERAC** (available at <https://www.bcerac.ca>)
- **Gayming Awards** (available at <https://gaymingmag.com/awards/>)
- **Rainbow Book List – LGBTQ Books for Children & Teens** (available at <https://glbtrt.ala.org/rainbowbooks/>)
- **Stonewall Book Award** (available at <http://www.ala.org/rt/glbtrt/award/stonewall/honored>)

Conclusion

- With the help and creation of LGBT2Q+ friendly spacing, library collections, and online resources; as well as mindful changes in language and incorporation of community resources, so can we lead forward a change within public and school libraries, and in time, the general public, towards creating safe and inclusive environments for LGBT2Q+ youth.



Thank You

- If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me:
 - Christopher Knapp, Youth Community Engagement Librarian at Prince George Public Library
 - Email: cknapp@pgpl.ca

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