



B Sides

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Where the Queer Things Are: Library Services to LGBTQ Youth

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cc by Sarah B. Alexander 2013

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Abstract

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Abstract:

In an age of shrinking budgets, tough decisions and political tensions, libraries must have a strong justification for LGBTQ youth services that is grounded in credible research if they are to stand up to challenges. My research examines why these services are essential in a world that is still unsafe for far too many queer identified youth, how to best engage with the community and what resources libraries can provide to young LGBTQ information seekers. Literacy and education theory were used as a foundation for the examination of the impact literacy has on the development of self through the formation of personal identity, the importance of mentors, and the opportunity for action. Current research about providing services to the LGBTQ community was examined for best practices and effective methods. The most important factors in successful services to the LGBTQ community are authentic and comfortable interactions, and the integration of queer and non/queer resources in reader's advisory and reference response for all patrons. While statistics on bullying and homophobic remarks indicate that conditions are improving, LGBTQ teens are still at great risk for homelessness, depression and suicide. Libraries must do everything possible to provide a safe space for LGBTQ youth to build their identity and interact with the community.

Keywords: LGBTQ | Queer Youth | Young Adult Services | Literacy

Please see "Additional Files" on download page for resources and audio file of two-minute speech



Where the Queer Things Are: Library Services to LGBTQ Youth

What the research says...

Barriers

- Queer lit less than 1% of YA
- 50% feature only white, cis, males
- Hard to identify books with LGBTQ characters/themes

Staff not comfortable discussing

Youth not comfortable asking for fear of rejection

Fear of community reaction

LGBTQ folk often an invisible minority

Heterocentricity

These barriers prevent many libraries from actively engaging & promoting their engagement with LGBTQ youth.

Literacy Builds Identity

Finding Mirrors
Learning to interact
Adolescence a critical stage of development

Identity Enables Agency

Engage with the cis/heterocentric world
Seek out and build community
Make independent decisions for the first time

Agency Promotes Action

Identify problem, gather information, take action, understand consequences

School Gay-Straight Alliances are NOT Enough

40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ

60% of LGBTQ youth report feeling unsafe in school

82% of LGBTQ students report being harrassed in school

Solutions

Display for visibility

All the letters, all the colors

Mark with stickers/booklists

Bring in experts, Use your Words

"Safe Space" signs & visible support staff initiate conversation

Know the research and the history

DON'T ASSUME -- integrate for all patrons

Educate yourself & your librarians

Research must form the basis of a strong policy of actively engaging LGBTQ youth in order to withstand budget cuts & patron challenges.