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Use of public library resources and services during the "coming out" process

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USE OF PUBLIC LIBRARY RESOURCES AND SERVICES DURING THE
"COMING OUT" PROCESS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Library and Information Science

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Library and Information Science

by

Rachel S. Wexelbaum

August 2004

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ABSTRACT

USE OF PUBLIC LIBRARY RESOURCES AND SERVICES DURING THE "COMING OUT" PROCESS

By Rachel S. Wexelbaum

This thesis addresses lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) public library resources and services in Los Angeles County. A paper survey had been distributed to a multicultural, multilingual population of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered individuals, and heterosexuals involved in the "coming out" process. Members involved in the "coming out" process perceive LGBT public library resources and services differently depending on their level of "outness," sexual orientation/gender identity, race, language background, and use of the public library in general. Each subgroup uses different methods and locations to acquire LGBT information, with distinct preferences. Reasons why those involved in the "coming out" process do not use the public library are also studied.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Improvement of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) collections and public information access for LGBT users is being addressed across the United States in many public libraries. Straight and LGBT professionals, however, do not always recognize the unique information needs and user behaviors of those straight and LGBT library users involved in the "coming out" process. [A generalized definition of "coming out" involves an acceptance of one's attraction to and orientation toward others of the same sex, or of one's orientation as the "opposite" gender -- in short, an acceptance of one's identity as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (Evans & Wall, 1991). For the transgendered population, "transitioning" is the more accurate term to describe their process of coming to terms with their perceived gender identity, as well as the process of learning how to live as a person of that perceived gender. For the purposes of this study, however, the term "coming out" is used to describe both processes, as well as the emotional phases that heterosexuals experience when coming to terms with a child, family member, spouse, friend or coworker involved in the "coming out" process.]

The needs of the "coming out" population are often overlooked because they are an "invisible" group. Not yet comfortable with their sexual orientation or gender identity to make demands, the "coming out" population does not have a voice in LGBT material selection, arrangement of the collection, checkout process of materials and provision of LGBT resources on public library websites. Past studies conducted on LGBT library users have predominantly surveyed individuals who have completed the "coming out"

process. Those already “out” may have different needs and perceptions of library service, quality and selection of resources, and different comfort levels with segregated collections from those who are still “coming out”.

Whether public libraries serve those involved in the “coming out” process effectively has not been addressed in previous research focused on LGBT library service. This is particularly the case for individuals from minority groups who do not speak English as their first language, bisexual and transgender populations, and straight people coming to terms with family members, spouses, friends, or coworkers engaged in the “coming out” process. This study collected data from the diverse population of Los Angeles County involved in the “coming out” process in the form of surveys and informal interviews on their perception of LGBT public library resources and services, why they do not use the public library to look for LGBT information, and where they do look for LGBT information.

Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of this study is to learn how and where LGBT and heterosexual people involved in the "coming out" process find LGBT information. The researcher also wants to learn how these populations perceive their public library as an LGBT information source, as well as the reasons why they do not use the public library for their LGBT information needs. Finally, the researcher wants to know if the LGBT information needs of non-native English speakers, as well as the needs of non-white populations involved in the "coming out" process, are being met in public libraries or elsewhere.

Although many LGBT information resources exist in Los Angeles County and on the Internet, this does not mean that public libraries should ignore the needs of their patrons involved in the "coming out" process. On the contrary, reference librarians must be aware of LGBT resources available to their patrons, especially if they do not exist in their particular library. It is hoped that public librarians will use the findings of this study to improve outreach to an at-risk user group in need of accurate, non-biased information to function and thrive in society.

The "Coming Out" Process for Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals

A generalized definition of "coming out" involves an acceptance either of one's attraction to and orientation toward others of the same sex, or of one's orientation as the "opposite" gender -- an acceptance of one's identity as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (Evans & Wall, 1991). Though individuals come to terms with their identity in their own way, psychologists have identified six developmental stages that take place during "coming out" process:

1. Identity Confusion
2. Identity Comparison
3. Identity Tolerance
4. Identity Acceptance
5. Identity Pride
6. Identity Synthesis (Creelman & Harris, 1989)

The first three stages of the coming out process for the gay or lesbian person are the most critical, as these usually involve a quest for information. In their study of the information needs of lesbians, Creelman & Harris (1989) identified the most frequently asked questions during the “coming out” process (which also apply to gay men and bisexuals):

CATEGORY I. Coming to terms with a lesbian identity.

Am I really lesbian? Is this just a phase?

Am I OK? Is it OK to be gay? Is there something wrong with me? Is it wrong?

How should I behave with this new image? Will I change? What should I do about my feelings?

Will I have a normal life? Will I ever find a place I belong?

CATEGORY II. Coming out to others.

How will others (friends, family) react? Will they still accept me, or will they reject me?

Whom should I tell? How public should I be? Should I tell people at work?

How should I tell someone that I’m a lesbian?

CATEGORY III. Finding others and learning the rules.

Where do I find/meet other lesbians?

What is lesbian sex like?

Who is and who is not gay? How do we identify each other? Do I look gay? Who is available?

How can I tell if someone is attracted to me? How do I distinguish signals between potential lovers and friends? How do I start a relationship? Who should make the first move? What are the rules? (Creelman & Harris, 1989)

Without appropriate information and support, lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals may feel isolated and abnormal. This isolation and perceived abnormality often leads to low self-esteem, depression, alcoholism, substance abuse, self-destructive behavior, or suicide. Many parents who reject their gay, lesbian, or bisexual teenagers often evict them from the house before they are capable of living on their own. Those teens that find themselves homeless may prostitute themselves to survive, putting them at risk for sexually transmitted diseases, drug addiction, and premature death.

The "Coming Out" Process for Heterosexuals

Heterosexuals experience a similar “coming out” process when they attempt to come to terms with family members, friends, coworkers, or clients engaged in the “coming out” process. Heterosexuals often experience a range of emotions and psychological changes when someone close to them “comes out of the closet” and confides in them about their identity. As explained in a brochure for those preparing to come out to their parents:

Many families take the news as a temporary loss -- almost as a death -- of the son or daughter they have known and loved. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross describes the stages related to the death of a loved one as denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Just as in grief, the first reaction of parents of gays and lesbians centers around separation and loss. (Sauerman, 1995)

During the stages of bargaining and acceptance, many of these heterosexuals also are

on a quest for information about lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT) issues. Without appropriate resources developed to educate the mainstream population about LGBT issues and concerns, heterosexuals may abuse or isolate their children with their words and behavior. Heterosexuals uninformed about LGBT issues and concerns may insult a coworker, or lose a friendship. As heterosexuals hold the majority of authoritative positions in society, lack of appropriate information about LGBT issues and concerns may lead to the isolation and persecution of an entire population under their care.

Transitioning and the "Coming Out" Process for the Transgendered

Transgendered people may face a double challenge. A transgendered person views himself or herself as a person of the opposite gender. Within that gender identity, the transgendered person may be heterosexual, lesbian, gay, or bisexual. The first challenge that transgendered people often experience is making people see who they really are. They want to know how to dress and behave like a person of their gender identity, and may want to know what medical and surgical procedures they will have to endure in order to exist as male or female. Transgendered people who are heterosexual within their gender identity may desire having a relationship with someone of the opposite sex, and want to know how to go about dating. If he or she has started a relationship with someone of the opposite sex, the transgender person often wants to know how to tell their loved one about their transition. Some transgendered people may first believe that they are simply gay or lesbian, and then experience "transitioning" later in life. Other transgendered people know since preschool years that they are really the opposite gender,

"transition" into their true gender identity to the point where they feel complete, then come to terms with their sexual orientation when they are older. Depending on their age and residence, the transgendered person may not have access to the objective, affirming resources that lesbians, gays and bisexuals may have available to them. Transgendered people who view themselves as heterosexual may not want to go to the LGBT community center, or look at "gay" books or magazines to learn about themselves. Transgendered people who are gay, lesbian or bisexual may want to go to the LGBT community center to find others like themselves, but non-transgendered lesbians, gays and bisexuals often do not understand the needs of the transgendered, and may discriminate against them outright because of their biological gender. (Non-transgendered lesbians, for example, may not welcome transgendered M to F lesbians to their support groups and bars because they do not want biological males in their "safe space".) Without appropriate resources, transgendered people may feel very isolated from the rest of the world. This isolation often leads to depression, substance abuse, self-mutilation, or suicide. M to F transgendered people with little education or resources often support themselves as prostitutes, increasing their isolation from mainstream society, and putting them at risk for sexually transmitted diseases.

During the information gathering process while "coming out," LGBT and straight people alike want reassurance that they are normal, that there are others like them, and that they can live a regular life in mainstream society. Depending on one's background, the search for appropriate information can be a challenge—especially if there are no

words for “gay” or “transgender” in one’s language, and if those concepts are considered sins or illnesses in one’s culture.

"Coming Out" Resources in Los Angeles County

In Los Angeles County, those involved in the "coming out" process have a wealth of resources available to them when they are ready. At twenty-three, the state of California has the largest number of LGBT community centers of any state in the nation. Of the twenty-three LGBT community centers that exist in California, four LGBT community centers serve Los Angeles County alone. Multiple college resource centers and support groups, and large LGBT public and academic library collections, also exist for the education of all Los Angeles County residents.

The Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, the Gay and Lesbian Center of Greater Long Beach, The South Bay Center (serving populations in Torrance, Hermosa Beach, Redondo Beach, Hermosa Beach, El Segundo, Manhattan Beach and surrounding communities), and the Gay and Lesbian Center of the Inland Empire (serving populations from the southeastern San Gabriel Valley as well as San Bernardino County)--four LGBT community centers in one county alone--provide space for youth and adult support groups, HIV clinics, homeless youth programs, and social, cultural and educational events. The centers' activities and social spaces often attract people from all ages, races, ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientations. Every LGBT community center provides free LGBT periodicals and other related information in one or more locations in the building. These free materials include newspapers published specifically for the LGBT communities in southern California, LGBT literary magazines (often published by

college LGBT groups), directories of LGBT businesses, safe-sex HIV/AIDS prevention information, domestic violence prevention, and advertisements for lectures, workshops, social events, films, and other programs of interest to the LGBT community. Some materials are published in Spanish for the Latino LGBT community, while other materials advertise groups and programs for LGBT groups of specific religions or ethnic/racial backgrounds. Support group facilitators inform their groups about the free materials available to them, as well as bookstores and online retailers that sell LGBT books and magazines.

Of fifty-one colleges and universities located in Los Angeles County, five community colleges and nine four year colleges/universities advertise at least one LGBT student group and/or resource center through their website. For high school students still coming to terms with their sexuality, or those who have already "come out," knowledge that there is an LGBT group on campus is not only comforting, but may be a deciding factor in their enrollment. Quite often this will be the group they seek to answer any questions they have about being LGBT and how to survive in the heterosexual world. Many people between the ages of 18 and 24 are still learning about their sexuality as well, and some "straight" students will also visit the LGBT centers for class assignments, for safe sex information, or simply because they may have LGBT friends who invited them to visit. Some LGBT student groups share space with other clubs, and school policy may dictate what materials they are allowed to distribute or keep in the club space. For this reason, a great deal of information that young adults involved in the "coming out" process receive is through word of mouth, or the Internet. Four Los Angeles County

college campuses--Cal Poly Pomona, Cal State Los Angeles, Cal State Northridge, and UCLA--have independent LGBT resource centers that provide free publications, an informal lending library, and computers with Internet access to all students. (Cal State Los Angeles' "Queer Connections" group uses the Women's Resource Center, which has become the de facto LGBT Resource Center, as all materials collected for the center have had a gay-friendly focus.) Students fortunate enough to attend these four colleges have no need to leave campus for a safe place to search for LGBT information.

Heterosexuals coming to terms with the "coming out" process of their family members, spouses, friends, and coworkers also have many resources available to them. PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) is a national organization that promotes health, support, advocacy, and education for the LGBT population, and strives to facilitate dialogue between heterosexuals and the LGBT population for "a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity" (PFLAG, 2004). In Los Angeles County, at least four official PFLAG chapters exist, often meeting in community churches. Other parent and family support groups also exist, often carrying the name of PFLAG, and hold their meetings at LGBT community centers.

A study conducted by Computer Economics shows that, over the next five years, the worldwide LGBT Internet population will grow from 9.2 million to 17.1 million (GLAAD, 1999). The Internet is perceived by many people involved in the "coming out" process as a "safe," confidential environment to search for LGBT information. Many LGBT organizations, colleges and universities, and private individuals have built websites for educational and social purposes to address the needs of the LGBT

population. Those involved in the "coming out" process who conduct an unfiltered Google search for "gay" will retrieve 61,800,000 results. Twenty-one of these first thirty retrieved websites link to national and international LGBT associations, LGBT news sources, health resources, coming out resources for youth, and social forums. Those involved in the "coming out" process who conduct an unfiltered Google search for "lesbian" will retrieve half as many results--33,600,000. Of the first thirty retrieved, twenty-nine link to national and international LGBT associations, news sources, health resources, libraries and archives, coming out resources for youth, and social forums. A similar search for "bisexual" retrieves 3,970,000 results from Google, while a search for "transgender" retrieves 1,240,000 results. Of the bisexual and transgender searches, 100 percent of the first thirty sites retrieved link to authoritative information sources or support forums. Specialized search engines, portals and online directories also exist for LGBT information needs. Unlike information in print collections, LGBT websites are updated frequently. Some allow users to create a nickname and password in order to chat or join discussion forums. This interactive, supportive and "confidential" information environment appeals to many LGBT people, which explains why so many become active Internet users.

Finally, there are the public libraries. The number of LGBT and heterosexual patrons who search for and/or borrow LGBT materials from their public libraries is unknown. Results of this study will show that the majority of LGBT and heterosexual patrons do not use the public library to search for LGBT information. Why is this so? With the "Renaissance" in LGBT publishing, plus the wealth of fiction and non-fiction

available, not to mention the latest information on HIV treatments, coming out, planning gay weddings, and gender-bending/cross-dressing that is actually available in California's public libraries, are patrons taking advantage of the LGBT resources that public libraries in Los Angeles County have to offer? What information sources do they use if they don't use the public library?

One of the reasons why many people may not use the public library to search for LGBT information is because this information is not advertised. People may not know what LGBT materials are available in their public libraries because most library websites do not advertise these materials. An analysis of the websites of thirty-six public library systems of Los Angeles County (including the City of Los Angeles Public Library System and the Los Angeles County Public Library System) shows that only the County of Los Angeles Public Library system (<http://www.colapublib.org>) offers distinctly labeled links to LGBT readers advisories for teens and/or adults, as well a link to one or more special LGBT collections or related research databases. The County of Los Angeles Public Library System consists of 117 libraries and seven bookmobiles that serve Los Angeles County residents. Although each library within the county system has its own website, each one is linked to the main County of Los Angeles Public Library website, thus informing patrons about recommended resources and special collections within their system. The County of Los Angeles Public Library System is the only public library system in Los Angeles County to maintain two special LGBT collections: the West Hollywood Public Library not only maintains a segregated LGBT fiction collection, but they also house the Ron Shipton HIV Information Center.

The lack of visibility of LGBT materials on a public library website does not always have a correlation with a lack of LGBT materials in the collection. All public libraries represented in this study had many recently published items in their collections of LGBT interest, with anywhere from 10-25 percent of said items considered "young adult" fiction or non-fiction. On the other hand, LGBT periodicals are not always easy to locate. Only nine of the thirty-six public library systems studied subscribe to at least one of the popular LGBT magazines available in large bookstores (*Advocate*, *Genre*, *Out*, *Curve*, *Girlfriends*, *Poz*). The City of Los Angeles Public Library System, The County of Los Angeles Public Library System, the Pasadena-Glendale Library System, and the Santa Monica Public Library System subscribe to two or more popular LGBT magazines to serve their patrons. *The Advocate* was the LGBT magazine most likely to appear in a public library catalog. None of the public libraries studied currently subscribe to *Curve* or *Girlfriends*, two popular lesbian magazines available in large bookstores. The City of Los Angeles Public Library System, however, does subscribe to the free local publication *Lesbian News*. While easy to retrieve from the OPAC, LAPL shelves *Lesbian News* in the Social Sciences/Philosophy/Religion department, three floors away from the popular periodical shelves. None of the public libraries in Los Angeles County leave free LGBT newspapers such as *Lesbian News* out with other free publications (*LA Weekly*, *Pasadena Weekly*, etc) because they want to avoid complaints from parents and religious groups.

Library patrons uncomfortable with searching the OPAC or asking a librarian for assistance may browse the magazine display shelves because they are easily accessible and visually appealing. A patron involved in the "coming out" process who does not see

a gay or lesbian magazine among other periodicals on the popular display shelf may automatically assume that there are no LGBT materials in the collection.

People are most likely to use the public library website once they are actually in the library to search for materials (as the library website may be the default page on public computer terminals, for example). If people cannot find the information they seek on the website, it is possible that they will be less likely to search for materials containing that information on the OPAC. The library patrons may assume that, if there is no link to desired materials on the website, then they do not exist in the collection. Those library patrons engaged in the "coming out" process who do not see LGBT materials advertised on the library website may experience more anxiety in the information gathering process, as they will be faced with the choice of asking a reference librarian for assistance or leaving the public library altogether to seek information elsewhere. The decision by public librarians to keep LGBT materials off their websites, in effect, may be keeping some LGBT people out of the public library.

For some LGBT teens, the public library remains a safe space. For these teens who may not be out to their parents, may not have the means or confidence to visit an LGBT community center, and might not have a gay/straight alliance in their high school, the public library teen advisory group may serve as an adult-approved source of support. Because these advisory group members are under 18, and the librarians must remain neutral, it is difficult to quantify this population, as well as to assess how much influence this population has over the selection, planning and advertising of LGBT resources and

services. For this reason, the researcher focused this study on the information needs and behaviors of those "coming out" at 18 years of age or older.

Agency Settings/Description of the Study Sample

It was the researcher's intent to select a random sample of LGBT and heterosexual people involved in the "coming out" process for this study. Those involved in the "coming out" process are an "invisible" population who cannot be identified by external traits. The researcher had to approach groups who either self-identified as "coming out" (i.e., "coming out" support groups), or groups that would likely contain people who were still involved in the "coming out" process (general LGBT conversation groups, PFLAG groups, or groups attending LGBT-related cultural events). Heterosexual people who would most likely look for LGBT information would also be found in at least one of these groups.

College Students

California State University, Los Angeles (popularly known as Cal State LA) is well-known for its diverse student population. Surrounding the Cal State LA campus are the San Gabriel Valley cities of Alhambra and Monterey Park, both home to large Chinese, Vietnamese, and Latino communities. Further north lie South Pasadena and Pasadena. To the west and south of Cal State LA are the historic communities of downtown Los Angeles. To attract new students, Cal State LA advertises its central location and diverse campus community:

As part of one of the most interesting and unique student bodies in the world, you'll be at the heart of a campus community that represents the

diversity of a world center. Our 19,000 students range from their early teens to their 80s, and come from all over California, most of the 50 states and approximately 120 other nations! At Cal State LA your learning experience isn't limited to the classroom and laboratory.... you also learn from colleagues and teachers whose backgrounds differ from, and enrich, your own. (California State University, Los Angeles, 2004)

Cal State LA makes good on its promise to recognize and support diversity. The curricula of most majors requires at least one class that addresses cultural diversity, and students are taught about the contributions that people of all races, religions, cultures, and sexual orientations have made to literature, the arts, philosophy, and other disciplines. For most introductory and certain upper division classes within most majors, students must attend a bibliographic instruction session where the reference librarians will teach the students about the specialized electronic databases that contain articles from scholarly journals that address many viewpoints from different groups. The reference librarians work hard to meet the information needs of their diverse patrons. Aside from the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library, Cal State LA also has four "Cross-Cultural Centers" to meet the information needs of certain groups: the Asian Pacific American Student Resource Center, the Chicana/o Latina/o Student Resource Center, the Pan African Student Resource Center, and the Women's Resource Center. Of the 130 student organizations exist on campus, 25 support the educational, professional, and social needs of distinct racial, religious, or cultural groups on campus. One of these groups is GALA: The Gay and Lesbian Alliance.

The Gay and Lesbian Alliance (GALA) exists to address the needs of the campus LGBT population, to educate the campus community on LGBT issues, to provide support for students involved in the "coming out" process, and to organize social activities for the LGBT campus community. GALA uses the Women's Resource Center for its meetings and social space, where students have access to LGBT periodicals, free newsletters and safe sex information, and computers with Internet access. Although the Women's Resource Center supports the needs of LGBT students and offers a safe, supportive space for them, GALA has been negotiating for its own LGBT resource center. According to Deborah Schaefer, Outreach Librarian at Cal State LA, many administrators, faculty, and student services staff support the creation of the LGBT resource center, but budget cuts and space restrictions have slowed down the project. One of Schaefer's responsibilities as an outreach librarian is to inform all campus groups about library resources that would meet their needs, and to offer them spaces in the library where they can post information about meetings, cultural events, and activities. For example, large billboards were posted outside the main entrances of the library to advertise "National Coming Out Day," and all of the activities GALA had planned to celebrate this event. No one defaced the billboards, nor harassed anyone who chose to participate in the coming out events that were held outside the Student Union building for all to see on their way to class or the parking lots. Many students watched the activities, while others stepped in to offer a few shy words of support, to mention their gay friends or relatives, or to ask why so many people believe homosexuality is wrong. Based on the researcher's observations of Cal State LA's "National Coming Out Day" festivities, it can be determined that, with faculty

support, the LGBT and heterosexual student populations have learned to tolerate and respect each other. Although the researcher did not count the students who declared their sexual orientation or support of gay people during "National Coming Out Day," the number of students willing to say so aloud, in the middle of a college campus, revealed a certain comfort level among the student population with LGBT issues.

GALA is composed of white, black, Latino, and Asian college students from 18 to 40 years old. Although the group's name is "Gay and Lesbian Alliance," GALA also has bisexual and transgender members. Within the safe, supportive space of the Women's Resource Center, they are comfortable with their sexual orientations and gender identities. Although the group is tight-knit, they are not "cliquey"--officers and members do their best to make newcomers to the Women's Resource Center feel welcome, and offer friendly assistance to everyone. GALA meetings (known as "Queer Connections") are held once a week, and each meeting starts off with a round of introductions so that new students will lose their shyness and get to know the senior members and officers of the group. While the researcher conducted this study, five freshmen (one white female, one Latino female, one Latino male, one Asian male, and one Asian female) became GALA members. They knew about their sexual orientation before they started college, but could not be "out" in their high school environments. The five freshmen found out about the group through flyers posted around the Student Union. Three were not out to their family or friends, while the other two were still not yet out to their family. All stated a desire to make gay friends, to learn how to deal with their families, and to learn how to be a "normal" gay person (how to have a relationship, how to do well in school,

and how to function in the real world). The senior members, also engaged in this process, received the freshmen warmly and encouraged them to attend more GALA activities. The five freshmen began to use the Women's Resource Center regularly as a place to do homework, to discuss LGBT issues, or relax, and in this way became regular GALA members.

Conversation Group Members

The Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center provides a safe space for "conversation groups." At the present time, ten conversation groups meet at the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center's Village at Ed Gould Plaza: Bisexual Chat (co-gender), Bookworms (a reading and discussion group for the entire LGBT community), Coming Out Conversation Group for Men, Lesbian Chat, Lesbian 30+ Friday Night Chat, Men's Forum, Positive Reactions (for HIV+ people), Senior Chat (co-gender), Senior Support for Men, and Transgender Perceptions (*In the Village*, 2004). Although only one group has "Coming Out" in its name, all groups deal with "coming out" issues at any level. The Center advertises its conversation groups and other services in free LGBT periodicals. Mental health professionals, doctors and social workers may also refer their clients to the Center for special services. Those involved in the "coming out" process will often find out about the Center's conversation groups through word of mouth, the free newspapers, or the Internet.

Led by volunteer facilitators, the groups provide support for members of the LGBT population struggling with various issues. Many of the challenges that group members face are directly related to their level of "outness," self-esteem issues, their perceived

relationship with family members, and level of socialization skills. Many members feel isolated in the "straight" world, and view group attendance as an opportunity to vent their frustrations, learn how to solve problems, and possibly make friends. Those involved in the "coming out" process will disclose their experiences to the group, and will often ask senior group members--and facilitators--if they are normal, where and how to meet other people like themselves, how to approach people for a date or for sex, how to deal with their families, and how to deal with relationship issues. Those in the transgender support group may ask where they can find certain clothes or medical treatments that will allow them to express their gender identity, or how to explain to family members, coworkers or a significant other about their true gender identity.

Some group members have belonged to a group for years, while others come and go. The friendliness and perceived safety of the group atmosphere is directly related to the ability of the facilitator to manage the group, as well as the personalities of "leading" group members who either welcome new members or dominate the group with their own opinions and agendas. The size of each group varies from an average of ten per meeting (Transgender Perceptions) to an average of 35 per meeting (Lesbian Chat). The group members come from a wide variety of educational, occupational, and cultural backgrounds. They range in age from 18 years old to their late 70s, and reflect the racial and linguistic diversity of Los Angeles. It is the facilitator's responsibility to ensure that all members introduce themselves, have a chance to speak, and feel comfortable enough to participate in group discussion or activity. Depending on the needs and personality of

the group, the facilitator will either lead directed conversations, or allow group members to bring their own topics to discuss with each other.

Ruben Romo, Conversation Group Coordinator at the Village, reports that in recent months there have been conflicts with facilitators and group members regarding group agendas, appropriate behavior, and topics for discussion. Both facilitators and regular group members feel a level of "possessiveness" toward their groups. Facilitators want to protect group members and maintain a friendly, supportive, safe environment. Some regular group members, however, see the conversation group as their own arena and will alienate others with their behavior. For this reason, some conversation groups are reluctant to have outsiders come in, even if the outsider wishes to address a topic of common interest. Some group members perceive the ninety minutes of group time as *their time*, their only time when they feel that they can be themselves and talk about their problems. Although facilitators read the guidelines before every meeting, and remind the members that group is not a therapy session, many group members take advantage, blocking out the needs of less aggressive members and dominating the group to no constructive end. This has created a challenge for researchers who want to study these populations. For a short-term study, they must put their faith in the hands of the conversation facilitators to distribute, explain, and collect surveys. For a longer term study, Romo has recommended that the researchers integrate themselves into the group for three or four months, then to bring up the study, as group members will be most receptive to a survey if it comes from one of their own, as opposed to outsiders who might "exploit" them.

The Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center also offers space to groups not facilitated by their own volunteer staff. LGBT cultural groups, twelve-step groups and PFLAG groups also meet at the Center. During this study the researcher surveyed a small PFLAG group of six heterosexual Japanese-Americans between 40 and 65 years of age. The nature of this group was similar to that of the Cal State LA group--welcoming and supportive. This group had been established over four years ago by two parents coming to terms with their daughter's "coming out" process. They did outreach to Asian church groups to establish dialogue on homosexuality. Many heterosexuals from Asian cultures--particularly the older, more traditional generations--experience similar fears of "losing face," "shame," and "disease" when their children do not meet family expectations. In some Asian languages there is no neutral or positive word for "gay" or "lesbian." For these reasons, "coming out" is often a silent, painful process in many Asian families; communication breaks down, children either engage in self-destructive behavior or leave the family, and parents experience deep confusion, guilt, and shame. This group was united in the love for their children, their connection to the same church, and their mission to educate their community about LGBT issues through the church groups that bind the Asian communities together. They were extremely receptive to the researcher's visit and participation in the group discussion, as it was a learning experience for them just as much as it was for the researcher.

Random Heterosexuals

Because the researcher wanted to know if heterosexuals used the public library to look for or borrow LGBT materials, she had to search for other heterosexuals outside of the PFLAG group. Many heterosexuals, particularly males, will not admit to participating in any activity that they perceive as "gay." Some heterosexuals approached by the researcher would flat out refuse to complete a survey with the statement, "Sorry, I'm not gay." For this reason, the researcher tried to increase her chances of finding a heterosexual sample by approaching random crowds at LGBT-related cultural events.

Margaret Cho is a popular comedian in southern California. Identifying herself as "omnisexual," Cho addresses issues such as gay rights, censorship, race, and women's rights in her act. LGBT and liberal heterosexual audiences enjoy Cho's humor. Cho is often invited to perform at the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, and local fans will flock to see her. The researcher took advantage of the crowd to locate heterosexuals willing to answer her survey. (The researcher must also assume that all respondents who identified as "heterosexual" truly are straight, and not covering up their true sexual orientation. She approached those who came to the performance alone, and those who attended with someone of the opposite sex.)

Random heterosexual respondents were willing to fill out the survey simply because they wanted to occupy themselves while waiting for the house to open. Unlike the other groups, they had no agenda and did not show much interest in the outcome of the research project.

CHAPTER 2: Background of Research

LGBT studies in library and information science is a relatively "new" discipline. Since the turn of the century, the bulk of LGBT studies has focused on psychology, psychiatry, arts and humanities, philosophy, culture, and political science. The first studies to address the needs of LGBT library patrons appeared in professional journals during the late 1970's. These studies focused predominantly on the information behaviors and user needs of adult white gays and lesbians who already consider themselves "out".

Review of Previous Research

Most library-related research dealing with the LGBT population has involved gays and lesbians who have already completed the "coming out" process. This population would have the least anxiety toward filling out a questionnaire in a public place such as a library, or speaking freely about their search for information. Subjects in these studies speak about their "coming out" process in hindsight rather than current reality, and may not recall accurate details about how they searched for LGBT information during that time or where they were most likely to find it.

Of fifty "out" white native English speaking lesbians living in Ontario, Canada, 84 per cent claimed that they used the public library to find LGBT information during their "coming out" process (Creelman & Harris, 1989). All searched for LGBT information through print materials, and more than half had an unsatisfactory experience due to lack of up-to-date or "positive" materials. The respondents who had a positive information

gathering experience remembered using friends or other lesbians as their primary source of information. This somewhat dated study, frequently quoted in LGBT library service literature, was conducted before the age of the Internet, and before improvements in LGBT collection development had taken place in public libraries. A study conducted on 141 lesbians in North Carolina (Whitt, 1993) yielded similar results, as did a study on gay male public library users in Edmonton (Joyce & Schrader, 1997).

From a sample of 44 lesbian, gay and bisexual library users of the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual collection of Brighton and Hove Libraries in England, only 9 subjects (20 percent) claimed to use the collection for “coming out” information (Norman, 1999). At the same time, no library users 19 or under responded to the survey—an age when many people are involved in the “coming out” process—and no straight people. All subjects surveyed appreciated the segregated LGB collection for ease in locating LGB materials, most were satisfied with the selection, and none expressed discomfort with going to a separate section of the library to locate materials. This lack of anxiety implies that all subjects in Norman’s study were “out;” Norman’s questionnaire did not allow subjects to distinguish their level of “outness.” The method used by Norman to distribute and collect the questionnaire, as well as questions asked, did not take the needs of those not yet comfortable with their sexual orientation into consideration, thus affecting results.

In a survey of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and gay-friendly undergraduates between the ages of 18 and 38 from Indiana University Bloomington, all eighteen random subjects voted the Internet as their number one source of LGBT information, with the university library’s segregated LGB collection their second choice, and the public library last

(Kingston, 1998). Because Kingston's sample was so small (13 "out," 3 "somewhat out," and 2 "not out"), no difference in user behaviors was detected in students who did not complete the "coming out" process.

A more recent study on the information needs of the LGBT population in the Denver area conducted by a graduate student from the University of Denver showed that, out of 169 subjects, the 22 who identified as "out to no friends," "out to no family members," and "out to no coworkers" were most likely to go to the LGBT community center (called "The Center") for "coming out" information (Garnar, 2000). All 169 subjects in Denver, regardless of their level of "outness" or sexual orientation, ranked The Center as their number one source of LGBT information, LGBT bookstore second, Internet third and the public library last (only 3.1 percent). Subjects were not asked why they preferred one source of information over another, but Garnar admits that those surveyed showed a bias toward The Center because completed surveys came from subjects who were aware of The Center's resources, as few completed surveys were from bars or the public library.

Due to the lack of consistent findings on the information needs user behaviors of the "coming out" population, public libraries may shelve "coming out" materials in inappropriate locations and may not purchase sufficient materials for particular age groups. Public libraries also may not maintain links to LGBT resources on their websites for those LGBT users who prefer searching for information online. Of 100 public library websites from major urban areas, only 16—less than 20 percent --contained links to LGBT resources, regardless of their availability in the library catalog (Wexelbaum, 2001).

None of the studies conducted by researchers in library and information science have taken race or culture into account when studying the LGBT population in or out of the closet. Many researchers focused only on white English-speaking gay and lesbian library users who have most likely completed the “coming out” process (Creelman & Harris, Whitt, Joyce & Schrader). Other investigators, when describing their research sample, did not mention race, ethnic background or language group of their subjects and did not ask them to reveal such information in their questionnaires (Norman, Garnar, Kingston). As a result, most of the LGBT materials found in public libraries—even public libraries in linguistically and culturally diverse locations—are written in English (though some materials may be available in other languages), and often do not recognize racial or ethnic diversity.

Not a single study in library and information science specifically addresses public library use by the bisexual or transgender populations. Misunderstood by both heterosexual and gay populations alike, many people who identify as bisexual or transgender are “invisible.” This is because many straight people lump bisexual and transgender peoples together with gays and lesbians, and many lesbian and gay people shun bisexual and transgender peoples for “wanting to be straight.” Some transsexuals consider themselves gay or lesbian, while others identify as heterosexual and do not feel that they have a connection with the LGB community. Some materials about transgender people and issues share the same shelf as lesbian, gay, and bisexual materials, but if someone strongly identifies as a heterosexual male (regardless if others see him as a biological female), and possesses the attitudes of a heterosexual male, the probability that

this person will look for “coming out” materials in the public library is not high. In public libraries, most transgender materials are shelved in the 600s, among a variety of psychological disorders. Transgender people who feel comfortable with their gender identity and "pass" may perceive their challenges as physical, rather than psychological. Even gay and lesbian centers that provide support groups and resources for transgender peoples spread information to this group through word of mouth, as few positive print or electronic resources exist to meet their needs.

No researchers in the library and information science field have explored the LGBT information needs of straight people. Though some researchers created questionnaires that included “straight” or “heterosexual” as a category, no straight people responded to these surveys. Poor distribution methods and anxiety about “looking gay” on the part of straight library users are factors in this lack of evidence.

Perhaps the best practical guide to address the myths about gay and lesbian patrons and how to improve public library services for this population is the pioneering work by Greenblatt and Gough=(1990). In a discussion list for LGBT librarians, Greenblatt stated that she is currently working on a second edition of her book, as the first version does not address multiculturalism, bisexual or transgender populations, or straight library users, and has asked discussion list members for assistance.

Research Problem

In order to improve public library resources and services to those involved in the "coming out" process, as well as to improve the quality and accuracy of information that heterosexuals receive on LGBT-related subjects, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How do those involved in the "coming out" process use the public library to find LGBT information or materials?
2. Is it possible that those involved in the "coming out" process are more likely to use sources other than the public library to find LGBT information or materials? Why would this population find the public library helpful or unhelpful for their information needs? Do factors such as gender, language, race, education level, or age play a role in information seeking behaviors for this population?
3. Do heterosexuals look for LGBT information or materials? If so, how and where do they search for LGBT information or materials? Are their LGBT information needs similar or different from the LGBT population? Do factors such as gender, language, race, education level, or age play a role in information seeking behaviors for this population?

CHAPTER 3: Research Methodology and Procedures

In a six month period, the researcher collected 74 completed surveys from a diverse cross-section of Los Angeles County. The surveys were collected from college students at Cal State Los Angeles, a random selection of Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center support group members (including a heterosexual PFLAG group), and random heterosexuals. (Demographics of this sample, level of "outness," public library usage, awareness of public library resources, preferred methods of gathering LGBT information, and preferred LGBT materials appear in Chapter 4.)

1. Formulation of Research Questions

After review of previous research and casual observation, the researcher wanted to learn:

- a. How do those involved in the “coming out” process in Los Angeles County use the public library to find LGBT information or materials?
- b. Is it possible that those involved in the “coming out” process are more likely to use other sources than the public library to find LGBT information or materials? Why would this population find the public library helpful or unhelpful for their information needs? Do factors such as language, race, education level, or age play a role in information seeking behaviors for this population?
- c. Do “straight” people look for LGBT information or materials? If so, how and where do they search for LGBT information or materials? Are their LGBT information needs similar or different from the LGBT population?

2. Instrument

A paper survey had been constructed to distribute to LGBT support groups and public libraries. (See Appendix A for complete survey.) The survey would collect general demographic information from all respondents, but would provide slightly different sets of questions for public library users and non-public library users. For both sets of questions, Likert scales would measure the respondents' perceptions of public library resources and services, as well as preferred sources of LGBT information gathering.

The first two pages of the survey collect demographic information. The first eight questions ask participants to select their age, language background, level of education, employment status, race, marital status, sexual orientation/gender identity, and level of "outness." (To quantify the comfort level a respondent would have with their sexual orientation or gender identity, the researcher had designed a level of "outness" scale based on the number of people the respondent has told about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. The level of "outness" scale is explained in Chapter Four.)

Question Nine asks participants whether or not they own a public library card, and Question Ten asks participants to identify the public library they use most often. For Question Eleven, participants must select "Yes" or "No" in response to the statement, "I use my public library card to look for/borrow materials that, in one way or another, deal with lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender topics (LGBT materials)." If the participants select "Yes," they must complete the section titled "Yes, I Use My Public Library to Look for/Borrow LGBT Materials." If the participants select "No," they must complete

the section titled "No, I Do Not Use My Public Library to Look for/Borrow LGBT Materials."

Once the participants have identified themselves as members of a particular demographic group in the first part of the survey, the researcher could look for relationships between these factors and public library usage. No matter what section of the survey participants choose to complete, both sections address the primary research questions of this study.

To find out whether those involved in the "coming out" process use the public library in order to find LGBT information or materials, the researcher wanted to find out if participants had any experience with looking for LGBT materials in their public library. On a four level Likert scale from "Very easily" to "With great difficulty," all participants had to identify the level of ease or difficulty with which they could locate LGBT materials in their public library (Page Three/Page Five, Question One). Participants could also state that they did not look for LGBT materials in their public library. They had to respond "Yes" or "No" to the question "My library has a separate LGBT collection" (Page Three/Page Five, Question Two), and had to rate the selection of LGBT materials in their public library from "excellent" to "non-existent" (Page Three/Page Five, Question Three). Participants were also asked whether their public library had LGBT materials in languages other than English (Page Four, Question Eleven/Page Six, Question Ten), and if any LGBT materials about people from other countries or cultures existed in their public library collection (Page Four, Question Twelve/Page Six, Question Eleven).

Based on participants' previous public library experience and how they identified as a demographic group, the researcher wanted to know if correlations existed between public library experience, demographic factors (race, language background, gender, education level, sexual orientation, etc), and level of "outness" in using the public library to locate or borrow LGBT materials. On a four level Likert scale from "Very comfortable" to "Very nervous," all participants had to identify how they felt about asking librarians for assistance in locating LGBT materials (Page Three/Page Five, Question Four). Using the same scale, participants were also asked how they felt about borrowing LGBT materials from their public library (Page Three/Page Five, Question Five). "I don't ask a librarian for assistance" and "I don't borrow LGBT materials from my public library" were included as choices. The researcher also wanted to know if the lack of a safe space to check out/read/store LGBT materials affected public library usage (Page Three/Five, Question Eight).

Finally, the researcher wanted to know what types of LGBT materials and information participants desired, how they searched for these resources, and where they preferred to acquire LGBT information. Public library users had to identify what type of LGBT materials they are most likely to borrow from the public library (Page Three, Question Seven), and whether they locate LGBT materials by searching the OPAC, asking a librarian for assistance, or by browsing the shelves (Page Four, Question Nine). They also had to rank on a scale from 1 ("always") to 4 ("never") a list of four reasons why they decide to borrow LGBT materials from their public library (Page Three, Question Six). Non-public library users had to rank on a scale from 1 ("always") to 6

("never") a list of six reasons why they decide not borrow LGBT materials from their public library (Page Five, Question Six). Non-public library users must also rank on a scale from 1 ("always") to 4 ("never") four sources they may use to look for LGBT information (Page Five, Question Seven), and identify LGBT materials which they think are most important for a public library to have (Page Six, Question Nine). The researcher wanted to know if participants from distinct demographic groups--heterosexuals, the transgendered population, non-native English speakers, and non-white participants in particular--had preferences for particular types of resources.

The last question of the survey asked participants, "Do you think the LGBT collection needs improvement? If so, how would you like to see it improve?" The researcher provided half a page for participants to write their suggestions and comments for improving the LGBT collection in their public library, or LGBT collections in general.

3. Population/Sampling

To gather data from those involved in the "coming out" process, the researcher would distribute surveys to those willing individuals/groups who were over eighteen years old and already identify themselves as persons engaged in this process. The researcher would gather data from LGBT and PFLAG support groups at the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, the LGBT support group at Cal State Los Angeles, and random volunteers at a comedy show that took place at the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center. In this way the researcher approached populations that were mixed LGBT and

heterosexual, or all heterosexual. (For complete description of the sample, see Chapter Two.)

Public libraries in Los Angeles County did not want to participate in the study. Librarians said that they did not feel comfortable leaving surveys out in a public space because minors might bring the surveys home, or homophobes might deface the space. Some librarians also felt that the survey was not appropriate to share with social groups that met at their libraries. The West Hollywood Public Library with its LGBT fiction collection, HIV Information Center, and lesbian and gay book discussion groups would have been an ideal place to distribute surveys, but the County Librarian would not grant permission to approach the West Hollywood public librarians with the project.

Based on observation, the researcher felt that LGBT library users involved in the “coming out” process provided more reliable information among their peers in a safe space than in a public setting. For this reason, the researcher decided to distribute and collect surveys from LGBT participants in support groups and meeting rooms housed in spaces designed to protect the LGBT community.

4. Data Collection

Prior to approaching subjects with surveys, the researcher had to seek approval of the research project from San Jose State University, as well as the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center Clinical Research Committee. In order to distribute surveys at the Center, the researcher first needed approval of the research project from San Jose State University. The process from submission to approval took seven months, which affected the researcher's ability to collect the number of surveys that she anticipated.

Once both clinical research committees approved the research project, the researcher discussed her project with conversation group/support group facilitators from selected locations. She asked for permission to explain and distribute surveys to conversation groups, support groups, book clubs, youth clubs, and other groups who would be receptive. If permission was granted, the researcher or conversation group facilitators themselves approached the group to discuss the project and ask for volunteers to complete the survey.

To increase the comfort level between researcher and LGBT participants, the researcher searched for LGBT volunteers from different racial and linguistic backgrounds to assist her in the explanation and distribution of surveys. Ruben Romo, Conversation Group Coordinator at the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, approached the gay male conversation groups with surveys. Under Romo's supervision, other conversation group facilitators of diverse sexual orientations and racial/linguistic backgrounds assisted with distributing and explaining surveys to their groups. The conversation group members had the option of filling out the survey during group time, to complete the survey at home and return it to the Center, or to fill it out away from other conversation group members in a private room within the Center. Completed surveys would either be returned to Romo, the group member's conversation group facilitator, or the Security Desk. Romo explained to the researcher that conversation group participants would feel more at ease with their conversation group facilitators distributing the surveys as a springboard for a conversation topic, because there had already been a rapport established between group members and the facilitators. Surveys and advertisements regarding the survey, with

instructions to contact Ruben Romo or the researcher for more information, were left in the lobby where all free periodicals and advertisements are left for the public.

The researcher contacted various PFLAG groups for a heterosexual sample, but only one facilitator consented to have his group surveyed. The researcher was allowed to explain her research project to the group, distribute surveys, and collect them. After the researcher collected the surveys, the group wished to discuss the experience. This provided valuable insights into how some heterosexual people discuss LGBT topics and look for information on these subjects.

At Cal State Los Angeles, the researcher asked permission from the head of the Women's Resource Center, as well as the president of the LGBT student organization, to explain her research to the organization and to leave surveys in the Women's Resource Center for students to complete. The researcher informed the students that she was a library intern, and encouraged them to visit her at the reference desk or during her office hours with any questions. The students had the option of completing the survey at the Women's Resource Center, or to complete it at home and return it. Participants would return their completed surveys to a location agreed upon by Women's Resource Center staff and LGBT group officers--an envelope tacked to the message board by the computers--which the researcher would collect every week. As the majority of students who used the Women's Resource Center knew each other and enjoyed a friendly rapport, they had no anxiety regarding completing surveys within the Women's Resource Center or leaving them in the envelope in a common space within the Women's Resource Center. Due to the supportive, friendly nature of GALA members within the safe space of the

Women's Resource Center, the researcher was able to integrate herself into this community and collect data easily. The majority of completed surveys, in fact, came from this group.

5. Data Analysis

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher tabulated all collected data to look for correlations between 1. LGBT populations who gather LGBT information and public library use; 2. race, language background, education level and public library use; 3. heterosexual populations, LGBT information gathering, and public library use; 4. level of "outness" and comfort level in using the public library to look for and/or borrow LGBT materials; 5. non-library users and comfort level in using the public library to look for and/or borrow LGBT materials. Data analysis is presented in detail in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: Findings from Data Collection

Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity, Race, and Language Background

Table 1: Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity Represented in Study Sample

Of the 74 participants surveyed in the study sample, sixty-two respondents identified as LGBT (83.7 percent), while twelve respondents identified as heterosexual or "straight" (16.3 percent). Of the total population, forty respondents (54 percent) were female. Thirty out of forty identified as "lesbian," seven identified as "straight," two identified as "transgender M to F," and one identified as "bisexual female." Of the thirty-four male respondents, twenty-six identified as "gay," five identified as "straight," and three identified as "bisexual male." No respondents identified themselves as "transgender F to M." One of the transgender M to F respondents also identified as lesbian on her survey, but she will be counted as a transgender respondent. In both LGBT and heterosexual categories, more females than males volunteered to complete the survey.

All respondents identified as a member of a particular racial category (Page One, Question Five). Racial categories included Caucasian, Hispanic (white), Hispanic

(black), African-American, South Asian, Native American, Bi-racial (combination of races not specified), Other, and "the human race." Of the seventy-four respondents, none selected "South Asian," "Native American," "Other," or "the human race."

Table 2a: Races Represented in Study Sample

Table 2b: Race Breakdown by Gender in Study Sample

	Caucasian	His. White	His. Black	Asian	Afr-Amer	Biracial	Total
Male	15	4	6	7	2	0	34
Female	16	8	3	7	4	2	40

Caucasians composed the largest racial group in the sample (42 percent), followed by Hispanics (30 percent), and Asians (19 percent). Of the forty female respondents, sixteen identified as "Caucasian," eleven identified as "Hispanic" (eight as "white Hispanic," three as "black Hispanic"), four identified as "African American," seven identified as "Asian," and two identified as "biracial." Of the thirty-four male respondents, fifteen identified as "Caucasian," ten identified as "Hispanic" (four "white

Hispanic," six "black Hispanic"), two identified as "African American," and seven identified as "Asian."

Table 3: Race and Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity of Study Sample

Of the thirty-one "Caucasian" respondents, twelve identified as "gay," ten identified as "lesbian," six identified as "straight" (four female and two male), one identified as "bisexual male," one identified as "transgender M to F," and one identified as "bisexual female." Of the fourteen "Asian" respondents, six identified as "straight" (three female and three male), four identified as "lesbian," three identified as "gay," and one identified as "bisexual male." Of the twelve "white Hispanic" respondents, eight identified as "lesbian" and four identified as "gay." Of the nine "black Hispanic" respondents, six identified as "gay" and three identified as "lesbian." Of the six "African American" respondents, three identified as "lesbian," one identified as "gay," one identified as

"bisexual male," and one identified as "transgender M to F." The two "biracial" respondents both identified as "lesbian."

Table 4a: Languages Represented in ESL Population

Twenty-seven out of seventy four surveyed (37.5 percent of total sample) stated that English was their second language (ESL). Sixteen respondents--more than half of the ESL population (59.26 percent)-- selected "Spanish" as their first language. Nine ESL respondents stated that they spoke an Asian language (33.33 percent of the ESL sample). Five selected "Chinese," and one selected "Vietnamese." Three out of five who selected "Other" wrote in their first language as "Japanese." Of the remaining ESL population who selected "Other," one respondent stated "Serbo-Croatian," and one stated "Creole."

Table 4b: Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity of ESL Population

Of the twenty-seven ESL respondents, three identified as "straight." (All were from the Japanese PFLAG group.) The remaining twenty-four ESL respondents compose nearly 40 percent of the LGBT population. Twelve ESL respondents identified as "lesbian," eleven identified as "gay," and one identified as "bisexual male."

Table 4c: Races Represented in the Spanish Speaking Population

Of the sixteen Spanish speakers, ten identified as "lesbian" and six as "gay." Of the ten Spanish-speaking lesbians, five identified as "white Hispanic," three identified as "black Hispanic," one identified as "Caucasian," and one identified as "biracial." Of the

six Spanish-speaking gay males, four identified as "black Hispanic" and two "white Hispanic." Of the five Chinese speakers, three identified as "gay," one identified as "lesbian," and one identified as "bisexual male." The Vietnamese speaker identified as an Asian gay male, the Serbo-Croatian speaker identified as a Caucasian gay male, while the Creole speaker identified as an African-American lesbian.

"Level of Outness"

In the first part of the survey, all participants in the study had to answer the question "Are you out to anyone?" (Page Two, Question Eight). Respondents were allowed to select as many of the following eight choices as best described their situation:

Question #2: Are you out to anyone?

1. "out to my friends"
2. "out to my siblings"
3. "out to my parents"
4. "out to my children"
5. "out to my coworkers"
6. "out to only one person"
7. "not out to anyone"
8. "straight"
9. Other: _____

Based on the number and combination of choices selected, the researcher ranked responses from the sixty-two LGBT respondents as follows:

Figure 1: "Outness" Scale

"Outness" Scale

0 = NOT OUT

(Respondent selected "not out to anyone," and/or "out to only one person." The researcher has defined any combination of these responses as "out to no one.");

1 = OUT TO A SELECT FEW FRIENDS AND/OR FAMILY MEMBERS

(Respondent selected "out to my friends," or "out to my siblings," and/or "Other" described as "out to some people," i.e. some friends or some family members. The researcher has defined any combination of these responses as "out to friends.");

2 = OUT TO MY PARENTS, SIBLINGS AND FRIENDS

(Respondent selected "out to my friends" and/or "out to my siblings" and "out to my parents," or "Other" described as "out to my family." The researcher has defined any combination of these responses as "out to my friends and family.");

3 = OUT TO EVERYONE

(Respondent selected "out to my friends" and/or "out to my siblings" and/or "out to my parents" and/or "out to my children" and/or "out to my coworkers," and/or "Other" described as "out to everyone." The researcher has defined any combination of these responses as "out to everyone.");

(Note: Data related to "level of outness" only applies to the 62 LGBT respondents.)

Table 5a: Level of "Outness" and Gender

The majority of those surveyed identified as out to more than one person. Males in this study were less likely to identify as totally out than females, and more likely to be out to no one. On the other hand, males in this study were also more likely to be out to a combination of friends and family members than females. In general, females received higher "outness" scores than males, which may be why more females elected to respond to this survey than males. The higher "outness" scores of females may also have a correlation to their comfort level in using the public library to search for and borrow LGBT materials.

Table 5b: Level of "Outness" and Race

If the correlation between race and level of "outness" is observed, Caucasians were most likely to identify as "out" to more than one group of people than other races.

Table 5c: Level of "Outness" and Race Among Male Respondents

Both African-American males in this study reported that they were either out to no one or more than one person. Black Hispanic males were less likely to receive a high

“outness” score white Hispanic males, but Hispanic males of both races were more likely to be out to friends and family members than just to friends.

Table 5d: Level of "Outness" and Race Among Female Respondents

Females displayed a different distribution of “outness” scores than males. Caucasian females in this study, like Caucasian males, were most likely to receive a high “outness” score. African-American and Asian females received higher “outness” scores than African-American and Asian males. African-American females in this study were more likely to be out to friends and family members than females of any other race, while Hispanic females of both races were least likely to receive high “outness” scores.

Education Level

Table 6a: Education Level of Total Study Sample

Fifty-four respondents (73 percent of total sample) went beyond a high school education. Of those who went beyond a high school education, thirty-seven (69 percent) stated that they were currently enrolled in an educational program. Twenty-three identified as "currently enrolled in a four year college," six identified as "currently enrolled in graduate school," five respondents identified as "currently enrolled in a vocational or art school," and three identified as "currently enrolled in community college." Seventeen respondents (31 percent of those who went beyond high school) had completed their education and earned college degrees. Thirteen identified as "college graduates" (i.e., bachelors degree holders), and four identified as "a Masters degree and/or Ph.D holder."

Of the twenty respondents who did not go beyond a high school education (27 percent of total sample), seven stopped at a high school diploma, eleven earned their

GED, and two respondents selected "none of the above" to describe their educational background.

Female respondents in this sample were more likely than males to have gone beyond a high school education. In the female population, thirty-two out of forty (80 percent) were either currently enrolled in an educational program or held a bachelors or graduate degree, compared to 61 percent of males. Females had earned twice the number of bachelors degrees as males. Although males in this sample were more likely not to have pursued education beyond high school, 75 percent of graduate degrees earned in the study were earned by males. No correlation existed between sexual orientation/gender identity and education level.

Table 6b: Education Level of English Speakers and ESL Population

Of the forty-seven respondents who speak English as their first language, thirty (64 percent) went beyond a high school education. Sixteen members of this group (nearly 52 percent) were currently enrolled in an educational program (eleven four year college, three graduate school, and two vocational or art school). Fifteen of the native-English

speakers held college degrees (twelve bachelors degree holders, three Masters or Ph.D). Of the native English speakers, nine earned their GED, seven stopped at their high school diploma, and one selected "none of the above" to describe their level of education.

Of the twenty-seven ESL respondents, twenty-three (85 percent) went beyond a high school education. Twenty (74 percent) were currently enrolled in an educational program. Twelve ESL respondents identified as "currently enrolled in a four year college," three identified as "currently enrolled in graduate school," three identified as "currently enrolled in community college," and two identified as "currently enrolled in vocational or art school." Three ESL respondents (11 percent) completed their education and held a college degree of some kind (two held bachelors degrees, one identified as "a Masters and/or PhD holder"). Four ESL respondents did not continue their education past high school. Two earned their GED, one stopped at their high school diploma, and one selected "none of the above" to describe their educational background.

Table 6c: Education Level and Level of “Outness” Among Non-Native English Speakers

No relationship existed between level of "outness" and education level among English speaking males or females. In the case of non-native English speakers, however,

those who had a higher level of education were more likely to identify as "out" to more than one group of people.

Employment Status

Fifty-seven respondents (approximately 75 percent of total sample) identified as having some form of employment. Twenty-three identified as "part-time," nineteen identified as "full-time," and fifteen identified as "self-employed." (The researcher did not ask respondents to identify their occupations because she thought it was too revealing a question. It is possible that some participants in the study may work for the military or the federal government, where they can lose their jobs if they reveal their sexual orientation. It is also possible that others may be involved in criminal activities such as prostitution, drug dealing, etc.) The remaining 25 percent of the total sample identified as "unemployed" (10), "retired" (5), or "disabled" (2). Eight out of ten "unemployed" had gone beyond a high school education. Of the eleven "straight" respondents, ten had gone beyond a high school education. Eight of the "straight" respondents were employed, while two identified as "retired." The remaining "straight" respondent had a high school diploma, and identified as "retired." No correlations existed between level of "outness," sexual orientation/gender identity, and employment status.

Marital Status

More females in this study were in relationships than males. Women in the study were also more likely to have children than men. The majority of "straight" males in this sample were in heterosexual relationships, with older "straight" males (ages 40-65+) more likely to be in a heterosexual relationship with children. The majority of "straight"

females in this sample also claimed to be in heterosexual relationships, with the older "straight" females more likely to be in a heterosexual relationship with children. Females who identified with an LGBT category were less likely to be in a relationship between the ages of 18 and 40 than "straight" females of the same age group. Males who identified with an LGBT category were less likely to be in a relationship than "straight" males in all age groups. Among the LGBT populations, there was no correlation between relationship status and level of "outness."

Public Library Usage and Library Card Ownership

Thirty-five respondents in this study (approximately 47 percent) claimed to own a public library card. No correlation existed between public library card ownership and age, race, language background or level of education. The majority of public library card holders (69 percent) identified as female (nineteen LGBT female and five "straight" female). Of the eleven male respondents who claimed to own a public library card, ten out of the eleven (91 percent) identified as gay or bisexual. When asked if they used the public library to "look for/borrow materials that, in one way or another, deal with lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender topics (LGBT materials)," only nineteen out of thirty-five public library card holders replied "yes." Of the nineteen public library users, all were library card holders (approximately 26 percent of the entire sample). This means that the sixteen remaining library card holders may use their public library, but not necessarily to look for or borrow LGBT-related materials.

It is possible that those library card holders who were not honest about their level of "outness" did not want to report that they used their public library to look for or borrow

LGBT materials if they believed that they would "get caught." Some public library card holders may have looked for LGBT materials in their public library in the past, but not at the time they had completed the survey. The past experience of these public library card holders might have influenced them to select "No, I don't use my public library to look for/borrow LGBT materials."

Of those thirty-five respondents who claimed to have a public library card, only eighteen were willing to name their public library. Of the nineteen library card holders who did use their public library to borrow LGBT materials, four chose not to name their public library (though some might have "given away" their library's identity by reporting a segregated LGBT collection--West Hollywood Public Library). The choice not to identify one's public library had no correlation to a respondent's level of "outness," as respondents could not select "out to the government" to describe themselves. Participants may have been hesitant to provide the name of their public library in case someone would "check" their circulation records. It is also possible that, for those participants who identified as college students and for others who have not used a public library in a long time, they simply did not remember the name of their neighborhood public library.

According to survey results, there was no correlation between level of "outness" and whether respondent stated that they used the public library or not to look for/borrow LGBT materials.

Asking for Assistance

Question # 4: "How do you feel about asking a librarian for assistance in locating LGBT materials?"

- A. Very comfortable
- B. Somewhat comfortable
- C. Somewhat nervous
- D. Very nervous
- E. I do not ask a librarian for assistance.

Table 7a: Level of "Outness" and Asking for Assistance, Total LGBT Population

In response to "How do you feel about asking a librarian for assistance in locating LGBT materials?", the majority of respondents selected either Choice "A," "Very comfortable," or Choice "E," "I do not ask my librarian for assistance." More participants selected Choice "E," "I do not ask a librarian for assistance," than Choice "D," "Very nervous." It is possible that some groups did not want to admit that they are

afraid to ask a librarian for assistance. It is also possible that anxiety may cause some respondents not to use the public library for LGBT information gathering. The higher the “outness” level, the more likely respondents would report being very comfortable with asking librarians for assistance in locating LGBT materials.

Table 7b: Race and Asking for Assistance, Total LGBT Population

Caucasian participants were the most likely to feel comfortable asking librarians for assistance in locating LGBT materials, as well as the most likely to borrow LGBT materials from the public library. Non-native English speaking respondents from other races were most likely to feel nervous about asking a librarian for assistance in locating LGBT materials. African-Americans and Hispanics who identified as black in this study were the least likely to feel comfortable asking a librarian for assistance, as well as the least likely to borrow LGBT materials.

LGBT non-native English speakers who expressed a high comfort level with asking a librarian for assistance were most likely to have awareness of LGBT materials in

languages other than English, as well as awareness of LGBT materials about people from other countries and cultures. This does not necessarily mean that the respondents asked librarians to assist them in finding LGBT materials in other languages, or LGBT materials about people from other countries and cultures. A high comfort level with librarians may signify frequent public library use, which would build a patron's confidence toward librarians as well as improve their independent research skills.

Preferred LGBT Materials and Sources of Information

Of the nineteen public library users, 100 percent answered "Yes" to Question #8: "Do you have a safe space to check out/read/store LGBT materials?" The researcher did not ask subjects to identify or describe the safe space, as that may have affected honest reporting of the response. A "safe space" can be defined in many different ways--a friend's house, one's bedroom, an LGBT community center where no one would judge one's choice of LGBT reading material. It could just be a quiet place where they like to do all of their reading, regardless of type of material. Of the fifty-four non-public library users, only three (5.5 percent) reported that they did not have a safe space to check out/read/store LGBT materials. Lack of safe space had no correlation with reported level of "outness." Of the fifty-four non-public library users, seventeen left the question blank, or wrote "N/A" in response to having a safe space for LGBT material viewing/storing. It is possible that respondents who do not read or view LGBT materials, or do not borrow LGBT materials, would feel that this question did not apply to them, but there was no correlation between lack of safe space or the choice "I do not read LGBT books, magazines or newspapers."

Of those who do borrow LGBT materials from the public library, selection of LGBT materials in their collections were rated from "Excellent" to "So-so." Fiction was most popular among LGBT women in this study, while non-fiction was more popular among LGBT men. LGBT men and women both liked to borrow "self-help" books geared toward the LGBT population, while LGBT men were more likely to borrow LGBT history books and biographies of famous LGBT people. Of those who do not borrow LGBT materials from the public library, LGBT men and women both identified a need for more LGBT non-fiction. There was no correlation between education level, level of "outness," race or language background and desired LGBT materials.

Respondents who used the public library to look for/borrow LGBT materials received Question #6:

Please rank each choice on a scale from 1 ("always") to 4 ("never").

I borrow LGBT materials from my library because:

_____ I cannot purchase my own LGBT materials.

_____ My friends do not have LGBT materials.

_____ I cannot get LGBT materials from an LGBT community center.

_____ I cannot get LGBT information online.

Respondents seemed confused by this question. Most ignored it, put a question mark next to it, or selected the most likely reason why they would borrow LGBT materials from their public library. Two people selected "I cannot purchase my own LGBT materials," while one person selected "I cannot get LGBT materials from an LGBT community center."

Alternatives to the Public Library

Of the 54 respondents who declared that they did not use the public library to look for or borrow LGBT materials, the majority received LGBT information and materials from other sources. Questions #6 and #7 of the set of questions for non-public library users asked respondents where they prefer to get LGBT information.

Question #6: Please rank each choice on a scale from 1 ("always") to 6 ("never").

I don't borrow LGBT materials from my library because:

- _____ I purchase my own LGBT materials.
- _____ I borrow LGBT materials from friends.
- _____ I get LGBT materials from an LGBT community center.
- _____ I get LGBT information online.
- _____ I do not read LGBT books, magazines, or newspapers.
- _____ I use a library in another town to borrow LGBT materials.

Over 75 percent of respondents ranked "I use a library in another town to borrow LGBT materials" as "never." It is possible that respondents who do not use their own public library for information gathering will not bother to travel to another library if the information-gathering process causes anxiety, or public library materials and services are perceived as non-satisfactory. For LGBT users, "I get LGBT materials from an LGBT community center" was most often ranked as "always" (42 percent), followed by "I get LGBT information online" (31 percent), "I purchase my own LGBT materials" (18 percent), "I borrow LGBT materials from friends" (5 percent) and "I do not read LGBT books, magazines, or newspapers" (4 percent). Those with a low level of "outness" were

less likely to rank "I purchase my own LGBT materials" as "always." Those who did not report being out to their families were least likely to purchase their own LGBT materials.

Otherwise, there was no correlation between level of "outness" and rankings.

Question #7: Please rank each choice on a scale from 1 ("always") to 4 ("never")

I use the following sources to look for LGBT information:

_____ free LGBT materials

_____ Internet

_____ friends

_____ videos

Those who identified as black (Hispanic black or African-American) and/or male were most likely to rank "friends" as "always," while Caucasians and Asians were most likely to rank "Internet" as "always." Among the LGBT population, there was no correlation between preferred source of LGBT information and education level, although younger respondents (18-25) were more likely to use "friends" as a preferred LGBT information source. Of the LGBT respondents, 92 percent ranked "videos" as "never;" those who did give "videos" a rank between 1 and 3 may be referring to pornography (not found in public libraries), or instructional videos for cross-dressing (also not found in public libraries).

Heterosexuals and Public Library Use

Ten out of twelve heterosexual respondents in this study declared that they did not use the public library to look for or borrow LGBT materials. They consistently responded that they did not ask librarians for assistance in locating LGBT materials, they

did not borrow LGBT materials from the public library, and they often did not comment or remarked that they did not know about the quality of the LGBT collection or what materials existed in their public library. This did not mean that they did not look for LGBT information.

For Question #6, four out of ten heterosexual non-public library users ranked "I get LGBT materials from an LGBT community center" as "always," while two purchased their own LGBT materials. (It is possible that these respondents came from the PFLAG group.) Two respondents selected "I borrow LGBT information from friends" as their first choice, while two selected "I get LGBT information online" as their first choice. Heterosexuals 40+ were least likely to select the Internet as a preferred source of LGBT information. All of the heterosexual respondents who ranked "I get LGBT information online" as "never" were in the 40-65 group.

Heterosexual respondents had a lot of opinions on what LGBT materials a public library should have (#9). The most frequently requested type of LGBT material was "'coming out' information," followed by "LGBT health/parenting info," "LGBT movies/videos," "LGBT legal information," and "LGBT history/culture/politics." Heterosexual respondents in this study never circled "LGBT fiction," "YA books," "LGBT music," or "LGBT magazines/newspapers" as LGBT materials that the public library should have.

The two heterosexual respondents who declared that they did use the public library to look for and borrow LGBT materials were both white, able to locate the materials easily, and both considered the selection of LGBT materials to be "good." One

respondent stated that they would be most likely to borrow "movies/videos," while the other stated that they would be most likely to borrow "legal information." Further research is needed on the LGBT information gathering habits of heterosexuals before the researcher makes further conclusions, but it is safe to say that, based on the results of this study, some heterosexuals do look for LGBT information and use LGBT materials from their public library.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, the majority of LGBT and heterosexual people involved in the "coming out" process do not use the public library to look for and/or borrow LGBT materials for the following reasons:

1. Lack of awareness of LGBT materials that exist in the public library;
2. Preference for alternative sources of LGBT information (LGBT community centers for free materials or support groups, friends, bookstores).

LGBT people who do use the public library to look for and/or borrow LGBT materials are most likely to be English-speaking Caucasians who are out to their friends, family, and coworkers. They exhibit a high comfort level with their sexual orientation or gender identity, feel comfortable asking librarians for assistance in searching for LGBT materials, and have the most familiarity with materials that exist in their public library collection. LGBT people least likely to use the public library to look for and/or borrow LGBT materials are African-American males and black Hispanics between 18-25 years old, and non-native English speakers who are not comfortable with their sexual orientation/gender identity.

The results of this study also showed that heterosexuals look for LGBT information. Unlike the LGBT population, heterosexuals are less likely to use the Internet to find this information, particularly if they are from the older generation. Older heterosexuals prefer getting information on LGBT issues and concerns directly from their family members, friends or support groups composed of people from their community. Younger heterosexuals, on the other hand, are more likely to use the public library to look for LGBT information. As in the LGBT population, females are more likely to use the public library to look for and/or borrow LGBT materials than males.

CHAPTER 5: Summary and Conclusions

According to this study, the majority of Los Angeles County residents involved in the "coming out" process are largely unaware of the LGBT materials available in their public libraries. Based on results from this study, the majority of people involved in the "coming out" process do not use the public library as a primary source of LGBT information. The fewer people they are "out" to, the less comfortable they will feel asking a librarian for assistance or borrowing LGBT materials from the library. Caucasians with a high level of "outness" were most likely to feel comfortable using the public library to look for and borrow LGBT materials. Those least likely to use the public library as a source of LGBT information are non-native English speakers, African-American males, and Hispanics who identify as black. This group, as well as those between 18 and 25 years old, is also the most likely to receive inaccurate information on LGBT subjects, as they prefer getting LGBT information from "friends."

The majority of people surveyed were unaware if their public library had a segregated LGBT collection, if their public library had LGBT materials in other languages, or if their collection contained LGBT materials about people from other countries and cultures. Those who knew the most about their public library's LGBT materials had a high level of education, a high "outness" level, a high comfort level asking librarians for assistance, and a high comfort level in borrowing books. Those who did not use the public library to borrow LGBT materials most likely had alternative sources for LGBT information. Those with the least amount of knowledge of their public

library's LGBT materials and a medium to high "outness" level might have automatically assumed that the libraries in their towns would have nothing (even though many college students had library cards that would give them access to the Los Angeles Public Library city or county library systems, which do have a large number of LGBT materials).

LGBT and heterosexual women were more likely than men to use the public library to look for or borrow LGBT materials, while men were more likely to purchase LGBT materials. LGBT women were most likely to borrow LGBT fiction, and most often reported that public libraries should have LGBT music or LGBT health/parenting info. LGBT men were most likely to borrow LGBT non-fiction, and most often reported that public libraries should have LGBT periodicals, LGBT videos, and LGBT self-help. In this study, the majority of LGBT men and women in all categories were most likely to get LGBT information from their LGBT community centers, with the Internet as a second choice. Caucasians and Asians were most likely to use the Internet as their primary LGBT information source.

Heterosexuals do look for LGBT information, but are least likely to seek this information from a public library. They will most likely gather LGBT information from a support group of some kind. Heterosexuals over 40 years old are least likely to use the Internet as a preferred source of LGBT information. Some will purchase their own LGBT materials, but most prefer free information. Those who did not use their public library to look for or borrow LGBT materials most often reported that public libraries should have coming out information, LGBT health/parenting info, LGBT videos, and LGBT legal information, which reveals that they haven't looked for these materials in

their public library at all. According to this study, there was no correlation between lack of public library usage among heterosexuals and comfort level with asking librarians for assistance or borrowing materials. More information is needed on heterosexuals who do look for and borrow LGBT materials from their public library.

Informal discussion with the PFLAG group revealed that they were very interested in LGBT issues, and how to address "coming out" within their community. In order to address LGBT issues with their community effectively, the need to gather accurate, appropriate information was crucial. The group would order materials from their ministry on how to create a supportive church that accepts their gay children, for example. Group members would also rely on the firsthand reports of their LGBT children and LGBT visitors who attend their support group and church. When heterosexuals are ready to talk about homosexuality, they will sooner approach their child, family member, or support group member for information that go to the public library.

Challenges to Research

The researcher faced many challenges in population sampling and data collection during the course of her research project:

1. Gender, race, sexual orientation, age, education level, and occupation of researcher

The LGBT population in Los Angeles County is an extremely diverse group. Although the sample reflects the racial diversity of the population, it is possible that more women responded to the survey than men because the researcher is female. It is also possible that the respondents' perceptions of LGBT public library collections and service

were not completely "honest" because the researcher is a graduate student of library and information science, and told participants in the study that she worked in a library.

2. Cooperation of support groups

The biggest challenge the researcher faced was not in finding the populations, but receiving permission to interview and survey the populations. Support group facilitators either felt "protective" of their groups, claimed to have groups that they felt would not accept the researcher or her project, or simply did not want to give the floor to an outsider. Support group members, or individuals outside of support groups, however, were usually willing to complete surveys. Though most admitted in their surveys that they usually did not use their public libraries, they believed that others might benefit from the results of the study.

3. Collecting sufficient surveys

According to the U.S. Census, approximately 9,637,494 people live in Los Angeles County (United States Census, 2004). If, in every human population, one out of ten people may be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered, then approximately 964,000 LGBT people--almost *one million*--could exist in Los Angeles County. They could exist without awareness, and without identifying themselves as such. In order to locate lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people for a study, potential subjects must identify themselves as LGBT. In order to do so, the subjects must have a certain comfort level with their sexual orientation.

As more than half of the volunteers who completed surveys reported a medium to high level of "outness," this affected results, as the researcher desired complete surveys

from those who were not yet "out" to family or friends. At the same time, it is possible that participants claimed that they were "out" because, when faced with a queer researcher, they may feel ashamed not to be out. Participants from support groups may have also claimed that they were "out" on the survey forms due to peer pressure from group members or the support group facilitators themselves, some of whom believe that it is a sign of weakness to remain "in the closet." If participants were faced with a straight researcher, that might have yielded different results.

4. Location

Los Angeles County is one of the most "gay friendly" parts of the United States. It is one of the few places where (at least on paper) LGBT populations are protected by anti-discrimination laws and domestic partnership legislation, and state universities teach tolerance. For this reason, many LGBT people settle in Los Angeles County, and public libraries do make an attempt to purchase up-to-date LGBT materials for educational and recreational purposes. If this study had been conducted in another part of California (or another part of the United States with a diverse population) that did not have legislation to recognize the needs of the LGBT community, results may have been affected.

5. Other uses for the public library

The researcher did not include a survey question dealing with the use of a public library as a social space. Some participants in the study may go to their public library for group meetings, book discussion, ESL/literacy training, or simply to wait for transportation. If the researcher had asked participants how they use their public library,

it is possible that participants would have displayed different comfort levels and perceptions toward public library resources and services.

Opportunities for Further Research

Due to public library constraints and lack of permission from youth groups, this study did not focus on the needs of adolescents under eighteen years old. During an informal interview, a youth services librarian who works for the Los Angeles County Public Library System commented that half of the teens involved in public library teen advisory groups are gay. It is possible that the younger generation is "coming out" at an earlier age, and that a higher percentage of people eighteen years old and under may be using the public library as an LGBT social space rather than a source of print or electronic LGBT information. Further research on LGBT public library usage should be conducted with this age group if possible.

Only two transgendered people participated in this research project. This was not a sufficient number to draw conclusions on the information seeking behaviors and preferred sources of LGBT information (if any) for the transgendered population. This is a difficult population to reach, as many do not wish to discuss transitioning or life as a transgendered person with non-transgendered people. Transgendered people who view themselves as heterosexual may be the most difficult population to reach, as they may not attend a support group at an LGBT community center. More research needs to be done on how to reach this population, as well as where they go to look for LGBT-related information.

Los Angeles County is a reasonably “gay friendly” area. Continuing this study in other parts of California where those involved in the “coming out” process do not have access to community support would provide a more accurate picture of where and how those involved in the “coming out” process, as a whole, look for LGBT materials.

Unlike other studies of LGBT library users, this was the first study to address the LGBT information needs and seeking behaviors of different races, non-native English speakers and heterosexuals. Based on the results of this study, the researcher hopes that public libraries will reconsider current outreach strategies to the LGBT community, and will increase visibility of LGBT resources in print and online.

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APPENDIX A

“READ ANY GOOD BOOKS LATELY?” Using the Public Library to Find LGBT Materials

How well does your public library serve your needs? Please take a few minutes to answer our survey. (All information provided will be strictly confidential. Each survey will be identified by a number that represents the order in which it was received.)

Directions: When appropriate, please mark only one of the listed choices as your answer to each question unless you are instructed to do otherwise.

1. My age is: ☐ 1. under 18
☐ 2. 18-24
☐ 3. 25-40
☐ 4. 40-65
☐ 5. over 65

2. My first language is ☐ 1. English
☐ 2. Spanish
☐ 3. Chinese
☐ 4. Vietnamese
☐ 5. Other _____

3. I am currently: ☐ 1. in high school ☐ 7. college graduate (2 or 4 yr)
☐ 2. in a GED Program ☐ 8. in graduate school
☐ 3. high school graduate ☐ 9. in post-graduate program
☐ 4. possess a GED ☐ 10. a Masters and/or PhD holder
☐ 5. in community college ☐ 11. in tech/business/art school
☐ 6. in a four year college ☐ 12. none of the above

4. My employment status is: ☐ 1. full-time ☐ 4. retired
☐ 2. part-time ☐ 5. self-employed
☐ 3. unemployed ☐ 6. disabled
☐ 7. other

5. In terms of race, I consider myself: ☐ 1. Caucasian ☐ 6. South Asian
☐ 2. Hispanic (white) ☐ 7. Native American
☐ 3. Hispanic (black) ☐ 8. Bi-racial
☐ 4. African-American ☐ 9. Other
☐ 5. Asian ☐ 10. the human race

6. I am: ☐ 1. single with no children
☐ 2. single with children
☐ 3. in a heterosexual relationship with no children
☐ 4. in a heterosexual relationship with children
☐ 5. in a gay/lesbian relationship with no children
☐ 6. in a gay/lesbian relationship with children

7. In terms of my sexual orientation, I consider myself:

☐ 1. lesbian	☐ 4. trans (M to F)
☐ 2. bisexual (F)	☐ 5. trans (F to M)
☐ 3. bisexual (male)	☐ 6. straight
☐ 4. gay	☐ 7. uncertain

8. Are you out to anyone? Please select all that apply:

- I am:
☐ 1. out to my friends	☐ 5. out to my coworkers
☐ 2. out to my siblings	☐ 6. out to only one Person
☐ 3. out to my parents	☐ 7. not out to anyone
☐ 4. out to my children	☐ 8. straight
	☐ 9. Other _____

9. I have a library card. ☐ 1. YES ☐ 2. NO

10. Public library I use most often: _____

11. I use my public library to look for/borrow materials that, in one way or another, deal with lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender topics (LGBT materials).

☐ 1. YES ☐ 2. NO

IF "YES", PLEASE GO TO PAGE THREE. IF "NO", PLEASE GO TO PAGE FIVE.

YES, I USE MY PUBLIC LIBRARY TO LOOK FOR/BORROW LGBT MATERIALS.

1. I can locate LGBT materials in my library: ☐ 1. Very easily
☐ 2. Easily
☐ 3. With some difficulty
☐ 4. With great difficulty
☐ 5. I don't look for LGBT materials in my library
2. My library has a separate LGBT collection. ☐ 1. YES ☐ 2. NO
3. The selection of LGBT materials in my library is: ☐ 1. excellent
☐ 2. good
☐ 3. OK
☐ 4. so-so
☐ 5. poor
☐ 6. non-existent
4. How do you feel about asking librarians for assistance in locating LGBT materials?
☐ 1. Very comfortable
☐ 2. Somewhat comfortable
☐ 3. Somewhat nervous
☐ 4. Very nervous
☐ 5. I don't ask a librarian for assistance
5. How do you feel about borrowing LGBT materials from your public library?
☐ 1. Very comfortable
☐ 2. Somewhat comfortable
☐ 3. Somewhat nervous
☐ 4. Very nervous
☐ 5. I don't borrow LGBT materials from my public library.
6. Please rank each choice on a scale from 1 ("always") to 4 ("never").
I borrow LGBT materials from my library because:
☐ I cannot purchase my own LGBT materials.
☐ My friends do not have LGBT materials.
☐ I cannot get LGBT materials from an LGBT community center.
☐ I cannot get LGBT information online.
7. If I borrow LGBT materials from my public library, I am most likely to borrow (please select one):
☐ 1. fiction ☐ 5. poetry ☐ 6. history/culture/politics
☐ 2. legal information ☐ 6. health/parenting ☐ 7. movies/videos
☐ 3. "coming out" information ☐ 7. self help ☐ 8. Music
☐ 4. magazines/newspapers ☐ 8. children's/YA books ☐ 9. biographies
☐ 10. other _____
8. Do you have a safe space to check out/read/store LGBT materials? ☐ 1. YES ☐ 2. NO
- IF UNDER 18: I do not need an adult library card to borrow LGBT materials. ☐ 1. YES ☐ 2. NO
9. I tend to locate LGBT materials by ☐ 1. searching the library catalog
☐ 2. asking the librarian for assistance
☐ 3. browsing the shelves

___ 1. at the circulation desk
___ 2. the self-check out terminal
___ 3. a friend borrows materials for me

 1. YES 2. MAYBE 3. NO

 1. YES 2. MAYBE 3. NO

Please write your suggestions and comments here.

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY. 😊

NO, I DON'T USE MY PUBLIC LIBRARY TO LOOK FOR/BORROW LGBT MATERIALS.

1. I can locate LGBT materials in my library: ☐ 1. Very easily
☐ 2. Easily
☐ 3. With some difficulty
☐ 4. With great difficulty
☐ 5. I can never find LGBT materials in my library
☐ 6. I don't look for LGBT materials at my library
2. My library has a separate LGBT collection. ☐ 1. YES ☐ 2. NO
3. The selection of LGBT materials in my library is: ☐ 1. excellent
☐ 2. good
☐ 3. OK
☐ 4. so-so
☐ 5. poor
☐ 6. non-existent
4. How do you feel about asking a librarian for assistance in locating LGBT materials?
☐ 1. Very comfortable
☐ 2. Somewhat comfortable
☐ 3. Somewhat nervous
☐ 4. Very nervous
☐ 5. I do not ask a librarian for assistance.
5. How do you feel about borrowing LGBT materials from your public library?
☐ 1. Very comfortable
☐ 2. Somewhat comfortable
☐ 3. Somewhat nervous
☐ 4. Very nervous
☐ 5. I do not borrow LGBT materials from my public library.
6. Please rank each choice on a scale from 1 ("always") to 6 ("never").
I don't borrow LGBT materials from my library because:
☐ I purchase my own LGBT materials.
☐ I borrow LGBT materials from friends.
☐ I get LGBT materials from an LGBT community center.
☐ I get LGBT information online.
☐ I do not read LGBT books, magazines or newspapers.
☐ I use a library in another town to borrow LGBT materials.
- IF UNDER 18: I need an adult library card to borrow LGBT materials. ☐ 1. YES ☐ 2. NO
7. Please rank each choice on a scale from 1 ("always") to 4 ("never").
I use the following sources to look for LGBT information:
☐ free LGBT materials
☐ Internet
☐ friends
☐ videos
8. Do you have a safe space to check out/read/store LGBT materials? ☐ 1. YES ☐ 2. NO

9. In my opinion, it is most important for the public library to have (please select one):

☐ 1. fiction	☐ 5. poetry	☐ 6. history/culture/politics
☐ 2. legal information	☐ 6. health/parenting	☐ 7. movies/videos
☐ 3. "coming out" information	☐ 7. self help	☐ 8. Music
☐ 4. magazines/newspapers	☐ 8. children's/YA books	☐ 9. biographies
☐ 10. other _____		

10. Does your library have LGBT materials in languages other than English?

☐ 1. YES	☐ 2. MAYBE	☐ 3. NO

11. Does your library have LGBT materials about people from other countries/cultures?

☐ 1. YES	☐ 2. MAYBE	☐ 3. NO

Do you think the LGBT collection needs improvement? If so, how would you like to see it improve?
Please write your suggestions and comments on the following page.

SUGGESTIONS/COMMENTS:

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY. ☺

San José State
UNIVERSITY

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Vice President**

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APPENDIX B

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval

To: Rachel S. Wexelbaum
1821 Vine Street, #4
Alhambra, CA 91801

From: Pam Stacks,
Interim AVP, Graduate Studies & Research

Date: February 4, 2004

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

“Unlocking the Closet: Information needs and user Behaviors of
Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender People and Heterosexuals
involved in the ‘Coming Out’ Process.”

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to all data that may be collected from the subjects. The approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Pam Stacks, Ph.D. immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma, and release of potentially damaging personal information. This approval for the human subjects portion of your project is in effect for one year, and data collection beyond February 4, 2005 requires an extension request.

Please also be advised that all subjects need to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal will not affect any services that the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (408) 924-2480.

cc: Dr. Blanche Woolls

The California State University:
Chancellor's Office
Bakersfield, Channel Islands, Chico,
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