
This study aggregates and analyzes the bisexuality-related subject headings used by three database types: folksonomies, public library catalogs, and a private subscription database. One folksonomy, one subscription database, and five public libraries (one from each region in the United States) were sampled to triangulate existing subject headings and how discoverable they are by database users. The folksonomy, which described only bisexual materials, was used to create a recommended reading list. These books were then searched for in the public library catalogs and the subscription database for sexuality-related subject headings and other descriptive metadata. Though each database contained at least some of the suggested materials, none correctly described each item; some were not described with bisexuality-related terminology at all, while some were misidentified as solely heterosexual or homosexual.

Headings:

Bibliographic data bases
Bisexuality
LGBTQ Studies
Public libraries
Subject heading schemes
Vocabularies & taxonomies
LIMINAL SPACE: IDENTIFYING BISEXUAL MATERIALS IN PUBLIC LIBRARY CATALOGS

by
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A Master’s paper submitted to the faculty of the School of Information and Library Science of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Library Science.

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Approved by

_______________________________________
Casey Rawson
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INTRODUCTION

Historical Context

Many studies in information and library science have sought to research the representation of LGBT identities in the field. However, there are some inherent limitations to this approach: “LGBT” encompasses an enormous spectrum of identities, as well as very staunchly separate ones. To research the entirety of the field is to necessarily sacrifice depth for the sake of breadth. Historically, gay and lesbian studies have received more thorough work than bisexual, transgender, and other identities, if only because they were “understood” more. This work is extremely important, and still more must yet be done.

However, this paper’s research focuses on an identity that 1) does not have much individual work, 2) is not very represented or understood, and which subsequently 3) may be harder to explicitly identify when it appears in media forms, because the terms, or forms of their representation, may not be clear: bisexuality. For the purposes of this paper, bisexuality is defined as attraction to multiple genders, as expressed in works of fiction. Because pansexuality also involves attraction to multiple genders, and the terms bisexual and/or pansexual may or may not be explicitly utilized by content creators or the media itself, and because a user may describe characters who exhibit attraction to multiple genders as bisexual and/or pansexual, pansexuality will also be considered an acceptable term to capture the concept of multiple gender attraction. These terms will aid
in an analysis of the current metadata in three distinct database types: public library catalogs, folksonomies, and subscription-based services. This data will answer an overarching question: are these materials described in a way that allows patrons to identify them solely on the basis of represented sexual orientations?

Why sample data from three distinct database types?

Even if library catalogs are not the primary source of patron browsing for all library users (many may try to find materials through an online search), this point does not detract from the patrons that do use library catalogs as their primary source of expert information, and regardless, libraries should still have as many items as possible correctly identified through rich metadata so a patron may find similar titles on the basis of sexuality. Because public libraries serve the general populace of their communities and have been historically regarded as institutions that value democracy and equality of access, they are the perfect initial point of research into whether or not public services are actually servicing the public. Librarians may also practice copy cataloging: the process of matching an individual library’s record to authority records from venerated sources such as the Library of Congress. This means whatever metadata is part of the initial cataloging of a book, that remains in public libraries across the country, no matter how potentially inaccurate or insufficient because the amount of work it would take to re-describe entities is overwhelming and often untenable for already overtaxed librarians.

A “folksonomy” is the combination of “folk” and “taxonomy,” a term that refers to organizational and classification systems that utilize user-generated metadata such as tags. In this way, folksonomies are public service communities as well, though their
community is their entire known userbase (and more, as many people anonymously browse such sites). Users may research materials through these resources before or during their search for reading materials at the public library. In addition, folksonomies have the potential for niche focus, freedom in terminology and cataloging style, and simply the free time that public librarians do not have, making them an excellent counterpoint to a traditional catalog.

NoveList, a division of EBSCO Information Services, is a reader’s advisory tool that provides an excellent middle ground for librarians and users seeking more common parlance than that found in Library of Congress subject headings. It was one of the first readers’ advisory tools developed and has been in the industry for over twenty years; libraries around the world subscribe to its myriad services (EBSCO). NoveList is a database that libraries can purchase a subscription to, which allows librarians and users access to book records with NoveList’s unique metadata enrichment, including appeal terms such as mood, themes, and writing style. Because NoveList is professionally curated by librarians but utilizes readers’ language and common themes, as well as special attention paid to diversity, an examination of the books as they appear in NoveList’s database will help triangulate the ground between traditional public library catalogs and folksonomies.

Research Questions

With the complexity of the systems and userbases involved in this study, a scaffolded set of three research questions guided the data collection and analysis process:
1. How do public libraries describe existing bisexual/pansexual media, what vocabularies are used, and how does this compare to bisexual/pansexual media described through folksonomies such as Goodreads and LibraryThing?

2. How many materials are collected and described as bisexual/pansexual, and is the provided metadata rigorous and sufficient to allow patrons to find, identify, select, and obtain (commonly known as FISO) the items, particularly patrons belonging to underserved populations who experience marginalization on multiple axes?

3. How can institutions and communities better describe bisexual/pansexual materials for preservation and future access?
Literature Review

Collection Development

In "Recent lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender fiction for teens: are Canadian public libraries providing adequate collections?", Michele Hilton Boon and Vivian Howard (2004) discuss the state of LGBT collections in teen literature. Though published in 2004, their study covers the content of Canadian public library holdings published between 1998 and 2002, and found that LGBT materials garner 34% fewer reviews than other titles, and the number of copies available were fewer. Some libraries were more likely to purchase LGBT materials than others, and user access was affected by the libraries’ locations.

Elizabeth L. Chapman (2013) tackles a similar issue in “No More Controversial than a Gardening Display?: Provision of LGBT-Related Fiction to Children and Young People in U.K. Public Libraries.” A mixed-methods approach including a checklist study that compared materials on a checklist to the catalog holdings of two libraries, conducted staff focus groups, and distributed a questionnaire through professional listservs. Focus groups and interviews were also conducted with LGBT youths and their parents. Particular shortages appeared in “picture books, books with trans content, books in different formats, and books from less mainstream authors and publishers.” Though the staff was in support of inclusion, they had concerns about “the quality of materials, provision of materials to younger children, and the possibility of parental complaint.”
Sandra Hughes-Hassell (2013) studied school library collections for the presence of LGBTQ-themed materials in “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ)-Themed Literature for Teens: Are School Libraries Providing Adequate Collections?” The study examined 125 school library OPACs to identify the number of LGBTQ-themed materials held. The school library OPACs were also checked for inclusion of a “core collection of highly recommended LGBTQ-themed literature” comprising 15 works of fiction and 6 works of non-fiction. The study revealed an overall trend of under-collection of LGBTQ-themed materials in school libraries, and few held the recommended titles. Suggestions for improvement include a comprehensive collection development policy and to be proactive about inclusion of LGBTQ-themed materials in school libraries to foster a welcoming environment for all students. Some of the methodology utilized in this study will be reworked for the purposes of this research.

Service

In “The Public Library's Responsibilities to LGBT Communities - Recognizing, Representing, and Serving,” Meagan Albright (2006) described the public library as a “cultural archive and community center”; an institution that has a social responsibility to include materials, programs, and displays that serve the diverse members of its community. This view of public librarianship as having a social responsibility to all community members is an important theoretical underpinning of this paper’s approach to service.

“Serving LGBTQ Library and Archives Users: Essays on Outreach, Service, Collections and Access,” edited by Ellen Greenblatt (2010), includes a variety of helpful
essays directly applicable to the field, including a “Selective Glossary of LGBTIQ Terms” by Greenblatt and a “Library Resources and Services for Bisexuals” written by Jessica L. Howard. Citing multiple sources, Howard’s description of bisexuality is essentially the potential for attraction to multiple genders. Some of the struggles outlined in terms of bisexual library service are the lack of services that specifically address bisexual issues and the idea that the dichotomous view of someone as either heterosexual or homosexual makes finding and identifying bisexual resources, or even struggles and affirmations with bisexual identity, impossible, because of a “part gay” and “part straight” view of the identity. Howard proposes that bisexual materials be clearly identified and available, like gay and lesbian materials; however, there is also an acknowledgment that it can be difficult to determine what identities are explicitly present in a material when umbrella terms like “LGBT” are used; these issues remain relevant and support many of the implications of this research.

Information Retrieval

Although focused on health and medical fields, “Identifying Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Search Terminology: A Systematic Review of Health Systematic Reviews” by Joseph Lee, Thomas Ylioja, and Mellanye Lackey (2016) explores tangible search issues related to LGBT health materials. They identified a wide variety of keyword usage in studies attempting to retrieve LGBT health materials, ranging anywhere from one to thirty-one keywords used to perform these searches. Their conclusions include a recommendation list for researchers attempting to conduct systematic reviews of health system reviews:
“(a) including a librarian or information specialist as collaborator to improve the search quality, (b) using more than one academic database, (c) using the controlled vocabulary of databases, (d) conducting searches of the reference lists of included studies, (e) reporting a complete specific search string so that the review can be updated as new literature emerges, (f) using dual coders for inclusion to improve data quality, and (g) using dual coders for abstraction or, at minimum, a reviewer to confirm and validate evidence tables” (8-9).

These suggestions should be transferable with some alterations to the public library setting, and are especially pertinent to adding a methodical underlining to any LGBT-related search attempt.

Prior Work in the Field

Two recent master’s papers in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s School of Information and Library Science program provide an excellent framework in which to expand and add depth to the field.

**Do Archival Finding Aids Describe LGBT Individuals the Same Way They Would Describe Themselves? by Erin Baucom (2016)**

Baucom’s 2016 master’s paper utilizes the LGBT history project website self-descriptive terminology to determine whether or not archival finding aids describe members of the LGBT community with the same vocabulary. This approach is grounded in an understanding that “in-group” language is often different from “out-group” language, and that “out-group” language can not only be inaccurate but offensive, dangerous, and outright harmful.
Several important conclusions appear in this study: finding aids are rarely online, often poorly researched, inaccurate, and utilize outdated terminology without explanation. Baucom proposes stronger research, subject access points, forums for additional descriptions and corrections, and more widespread usage of topic subject guides and bibliographies. Though these suggestions are specifically geared toward the archival community, they are still painfully relevant in the public library setting, which deals with materials that span decades, use varieties of terminology from within and without LGBT communities, and may require a similar prognosis.

Retrieval of LGBTQ+ Recreational Reading Material: A Comparative Study by Claire Payne (2018)

Payne’s 2018 master’s paper tackles analogous concepts by reviewing metadata, tagging, cataloging, and classification systems, and subsequently comparing the retrievability of LGBTQ+ recreational materials on Archive of Our Own (AO3), a fanwork repository, and traditional library cataloging and classification systems. However, where this paper analyzes the existing metadata, Payne conducted survey research to glean insights into the user experience of LGBTQ+ information retrieval.

Her findings demonstrate that users, predominantly fans with sizable information retrieval experience, prefer AO3’s structure and system, and had negative feedback for many aspects of traditional library systems. Users preferred the findability of author-assigned metadata at AO3, and Payne suggests allowing users more control in their metadata in traditional library systems. Librarians may not need to entirely restructure OPACs and other extant information structures, but rather apply appropriate, broad LGBTQ+ subject headings to works that feature LGBTQ+ characters and relationships.
(such as “Queer relationship – Fiction”), which Payne posits as not being “substantively different” from existing subject headings such as “Divorce – Fiction.”

This foregrounds the understanding that many users find library systems unusable, outdated, and difficult to navigate at best, especially when searching for material about marginalized populations. Payne also called for more literature in the field of LGBTQ+ information retrieval, especially because the conversation around LGBTQ+ issues is constantly in flux, and exploration of alt-library metadata systems like Goodreads.

By fusing the theoretical grounding and research methods of these two papers with Hughes-Hassell’s school library research, my study synthesizes and adds to the growing field of LGBT information retrieval research and uses the findings to project a plan for future growth in professional settings.
Methodology

Introduction

Are collections deficient in bisexual materials? Are the materials that are collected described as containing bisexual content? Are current descriptive practices of these materials sufficient for information retrieval? To expand Baucom and Payne’s research, a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of data from multiple sources was conducted. To select the core list of materials, LGBT recommendation guides and user-created folksonomy tags on Goodreads and LibraryThing were consulted. Then, public library catalogs were consulted and searched to determine how many items on a core list of twenty materials were properly found or identifiable.

Goodreads and LibraryThing are fascinating catalogs because they both employ librarians as well as users to create metadata. A combination of data analysis of existing folksonomy metadata as well as tagging systems revealed the efficacy of existing designs and subject headings, whether or not they align with common bisexual/pansexual community parlance, and what the future of the field may look like.

Sampling

The suggested collection list of twenty books was chosen based on materials identified by “The Bibliography” (https://www.librarything.com/catalog/The_Bibliography/allcollections), a LibraryThing bisexual book database. The list includes ten
adult fiction titles and ten young adult fiction titles, spanning genre. Criteria for
purposeful selection included a protagonist(s) who is identified by the author or readers as
bisexual/pansexual, number of ratings, reviews, authorship, and publication date (with
preference given to authors who identify as bisexual/pansexual and more recently-
published titles). All of the titles selected have been published within the last decade and
have been nominated for and/or received awards.

The Bi-bibliography folksonomy was selected because it is a living, frequently-
updated resource with rich metadata and justification for the inclusion, while many other
recommendation lists and resources are static. Due to its exclusive focus on bisexual
materials, the Bi-bibliography is able to enrich its description with tags for race, ethnicity,
religion, and disability, as well as specifying the types of relationship and gender
identities present within the narrative.

However, during the course of my research, it soon became abundantly clear that
even the Bi-bibliography could not perfectly identify bisexual literature. The Bi-bibliography
identifies materials as bisexual based on behavior, not identity: the exact terminology is
“a main character has/has had romantic and/or sexual relationships with people of more
than one gender” (The Bi-bibliography). Although it was impossible for me to read every
item individually, I had to conduct extensive research to vet the justification for the
labeling of the material as “bisexual.” Many initially-selected materials for the
recommended list had to be removed because the subjects actually identify as lesbians:
The Paying Guests by Sarah Waters and Here Comes the Sun by Nicole Dennis-Benn are
two examples of this phenomenon, which also demonstrates the general difficulty
librarians and readers face when attempting to accurately identify and describe bisexual
materials. The hours poured into simply confirming whether or not a book truly could be described as containing a bisexual protagonist or love interest falls far beyond the abilities of most public librarians. Disagreement about the labeling of a character’s sexuality are bound to occur when the publisher or author does not explicitly address the issue. Still, the recommended reading list includes books that some searching should confirm as containing bisexual content, to varying degrees of prominence within the text. The recommended reading list can be found in Appendix A, which contains descriptions of each item selected.

To analyze the average public library catalog’s collection, five public libraries, one for each geographic region of the United States, was randomly sampled from LibWeb’s United States Public Libraries list by state (https://www.lib-web.org/united-states/public-libraries/). Each library on the list was assigned a region and a number. The Research Randomizer number generator selected one random number from the range of numbers in each region to determine the representative public library (https://www.randomizer.org/).

Data Analysis

Data was collected from the Bi-bliography, each of the library’s online catalogs, and NoveList’s database. To obtain and analyze the public library record for each item on the recommended list, searches were conducted on each of the five sampled library catalogs to ascertain the following: whether or not an item is included in the collection, whether or not the item had subject headings that indicated sexual orientation and what those terms were, whether or not the item had tags, keywords, or other user-generated
metadata that indicate sexual orientation, as well as a comparison of library-created metadata versus user-created metadata (if allowed through the library’s cataloging system). Incidentally, none of the databases utilized any form of pansexuality as part of the subject heading vocabulary; subsequently, only bisexual terms were collected and reviewed as part of this study.

Following is a qualitative and quantitative description of how readers describe the books through folksonomies, a quantitative description of the number of selected titles each sampled library holds, a quantitative and qualitative description of how the held titles are described in the public library catalogs, and a comparison of the folksonomy metadata to the library metadata with observations and suggestions for improvements.

Bisexuality Description in The Bi-bibliography (LibraryThing)

Due to The Bi-bibliography’s focus on describing bisexual materials, their metadata delves deeper into intersecting identities and potential terminology than a public library utilizing Library of Congress subject headings. A typical entry in The Bi-bibliography includes the information found in Figure 1: “Title,” “Author,” “Date,” “Tags,” “Collections.” “Comments,” and “CK: Awards and honors” (CK stands for Common Knowledge). Not pictured are “CK: Series,” indicating the series, if any, the book belongs to, the “Entry date,” the date the item was entered into The Bi-bibliography, and “Publication,” the book publisher’s name, edition statement, and the page length. The most descriptive elements are the tags, collections, comments, and awards and honors.
Figure 1: An Unkindness of Ghosts in The Bibliography

[https://www.librarything.com/catalog/The_Bibliography&deepsearch=an+unkindness+of+ghosts]
The Bi-bibliography’s tags work within the collection to enrich a user’s understanding of the particular bisexual representation within the text, as well as other intersecting marginalized identities (commonly shortened to “IMI,” as seen in Figure 1). This includes specification about who within the book is bisexual (“MC” denotes a main character) and what intersecting identities they have: in this case, “Genderqueer,” “Nonbinary,” and “People of Color (Unknown Race/Ethnicity)” are specified for the protagonist. Multiple terms are applied due to the inherent ambiguities within labels, especially in science fiction and fantasy, where sexuality terms may not be explicitly used. The tags specify that this main character is both a “Cisgender Bisexual Woman” and a “Nonbinary Bisexual Person,” despite the potential contradictions within these simultaneous tags. The comments expand upon this in the “bisexual content” section by pointing out that the protagonist “uses she pronouns, but possibly nonbinary or genderqueer gender identity” (The Bi-bibliography). These practices allow users to familiarize themselves with the breadth and depth of bisexual identity present within a work, as well as on the axes of gender identity and racial identity.

However, despite the Bi-bibliography’s rich descriptive practices, the difficulty of defining sexuality is clear. Due to the Bi-bibliography’s wording, as seen in the “bisexual content” section, materials are included based on the relationships the characters have within the text rather than their expressed identity. This is certainly understandable considering the difficulty of labeling a character’s sexuality, especially when an author or the text itself does not provide a label. Where some books, such as Here Comes the Sun by Nicole Dennis-Benn, appeared to be about lesbian characters initially, the Bi-bibliography uses both “MC: Cisgender Bisexual Woman” and “MC: Cisgender Bisexual
Woman,” as well as “Mixed Orientation Relationship” to indicate the different sexualities involved in the main romantic relationship. Due to the hyperfocus on one particular identity, the Bi-bliography provides users a rich descriptive overview of bisexual materials at a glance.

Library Catalogs

None of the public library catalogs sampled utilized a form of user-created descriptive metadata. Subsequently, the only librarian-applied metadata terms were Library of Congress subject headings, which most libraries use as a standard for linked data consistency. Following are each sampled public library’s collection status and sexuality-descriptive subject headings per item.

Library A (Western Region)

Library A has a service population of 107,629 and a 2019 public library budget of $3,226,287. Fourteen out of the twenty Bi-bliography books are collected (70%). Seven of fourteen collected books have a type of sexuality described by subject heading (50%). Five of fourteen collected books use the term bisexual in subject headings (36%). Two books were described with heterosexual or homosexual terms only (Her Body and Other Parties and They Both Die at the End). In Her Body and Other Parties, a short story collection, multiple female protagonists identify as lesbian or bisexual, but the book is only identified by the subject heading “Man-woman relationships -- Fiction.” In They Both Die at the End, the main romantic relationship is between two men, though one identifies as gay and the other identifies as bisexual. See Table 1 for a summary of data from this library.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Collected?</th>
<th>Relevant Subject Headings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>An Unkindness of Ghosts</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Everfair</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Her Body and Other Parties</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Man-woman relationships - Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Life and Death of Sophie Stark</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Last Nude</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hild</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Frog Music</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Passing Strange</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>In One Person</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexual men -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Fifth Season</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Not Your Sidekick</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Little &amp; Lion</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexuality -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Love in the Time of Global Warming</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bisexual teenagers -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>In Other Lands</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexuality -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Like Water</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexuality -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>They Both Die at the End</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Gays -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gay teenagers -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Collected?</td>
<td>Relevant Subject Headings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Unkindness of Ghosts</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everfair</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her Body and Other Parties</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Man-woman relationships - Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Life and Death of Sophie Stark</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Last Nude</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Library B (Midwestern Region)**

Library B has a service population of 15,417 and a 2019 public library budget of $869,00. Eighteen out of the twenty Bi-bliography books are collected (90%). Eight out of eighteen collected books have a type of sexuality described by subject heading (44%). Five of eighteen collected books use the term bisexual in subject headings (28%). Three books were described with heterosexual or homosexual terms only (*Her Body and Other Parties, Not Your Sidekick, and They Both Die at the End*). This is the same issue as seen in Library A’s catalog, with the addition of *Not Your Sidekick*, wherein the publisher’s description includes the main female character’s crush on another female character, which presumably prompted its identification as containing “Lesbian Teenagers” despite the protagonist being bisexual. See Table 2 for a summary of data from this library.

**Table 2: Library B (Midwestern Region)**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Availability</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hild</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frog Music</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing Strange</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In One Person</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexuals -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fifth Season</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Your Sidekick</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lesbian teenagers -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love in the Time of Global Warming</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Other Lands</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexuality -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like Water</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexuality -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They Both Die at the End</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Gay men -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otherbound</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pantomime</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Summer Prince</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Library C (Southwestern Region)
Library C has a service population of 99,166 and a 2018-2019 public library budget of $3,323,468. Nine out of the twenty Bi-bliography books are collected (45%). Four of eight collected books have a type of sexuality described by subject heading (50%). Three of eight collected books used the term bisexual in subject headings (38%). One book was described with homosexual terms only (*They Both Die at the End*), matching the trend as seen in libraries A and B. See Table 3 for a summary of data from this library.

**Table 3: Library C (Southwestern Region)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Collected?</th>
<th>Relevant Subject Headings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>An Unkindness of Ghosts</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Everfair</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Her Body and Other Parties</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Life and Death of Sophie Stark</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Last Nude</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hild</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Frog Music</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Passing Strange</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>In One Person</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Fifth Season</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Not Your Sidekick</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Little &amp; Lion</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexuality -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Love in the Time of Global Warming</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Collected?</td>
<td>Relevant Subject Headings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Gentleman’s Guide to Vice and Virtue</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexual teenagers -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Other Lands</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexuality -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like Water</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>They Both Die at the End</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Gays -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otherbound</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pantomime</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Summer Prince</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Library D (Southeastern Region)**

Library D has a service population of 23,111 and a 2019 public library budget of $1,517,424. Nineteen out of the twenty Bi-bliography books are collected (95%). Seven of nineteen collected books have a type of sexuality described by subject heading (37%). Five of nineteen collected books used the term bisexual in subject headings (26%). Two books were described with homosexual terms only (*Passing Strange* and *They Both Die at the End*). *Passing Strange* features both bisexual and lesbian women, while *They Both Die at the End*, which similarly features both a gay and bisexual man, continues to be described as gay only. See Table 4 for a summary of data from this library.

**Table 4: Library D (Southeastern Region)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Collected?</th>
<th>Relevant Subject Headings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>An Unkindness of Ghosts</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Everfair</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Her Body and Other Parties</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Life and Death of Sophie Stark</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Last Nude</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hild</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Frog Music</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Passing Strange</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lesbians -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>In One Person</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexual men -- Fiction. Bisexuality -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Fifth Season</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Not Your Sidekick</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Little &amp; Lion</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexuality -- Juvenile fiction. Bisexuality -- Fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Love in the Time of Global Warming</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>In Other Lands</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexuality -- Juvenile fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Like Water</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexuality -- Juvenile fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>They Both Die at the End</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Gays -- Juvenile fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Otherbound</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pantomime</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Summer Prince</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Library E (Northeastern Region)

Library E has a service population of 46,664 and a 2019 public library budget of $1,179,846. Nine out of the twenty Bi-bliography books are collected (45%). Four of nine collected books have a type of sexuality described by subject heading (44%). Three of nine collected books used the term bisexual in subject headings (33%). One book was described with homosexual terms only (They Both Die at the End), matching the prior pattern. See Table 5 for a summary of data from this library.

Table 5: Library E (Northeastern Region)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Collected?</th>
<th>Relevant Subject Headings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An Unkindness of Ghosts</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everfair</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her Body and Other Parties</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Life and Death of Sophie Stark</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Last Nude</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hild</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frog Music</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing Strange</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In One Person</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexual men -- Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fifth Season</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Your Sidekick</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little &amp; Lion</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love in the Time of Global Warming</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Bisexuality Featured in Publisher’s Summary</td>
<td>Bisexuality in Subject Heading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gentleman’s Guide to Vice and Virtue</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexuality -- Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Other Lands</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like Water</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexuality -- Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They Both Die at the End</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Gays – Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gays -- Juvenile fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otherbound</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pantomime</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Summer Prince</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Library Catalog Summary**

Universally, the books where bisexuality featured in the publisher’s summary were described with bisexuality in the subject heading (*In One Person, Little & Lion, The Gentleman’s Guide to Vice and Virtue, In Other Lands, and Like Water*). Several books were universally described with “Gays” or “Lesbians,” despite one of the protagonists in the relationships being bisexual: *They Both Die at the End, Passing Strange,* and *Not Your Sidekick*. In the case of the books described with strictly homosexual terms, the main relationships in those books were between individuals of the same gender, regardless of the identity of the characters—implying the genders of the people involved in the novel’s main romantic relationship trumps the characters’ identities in terms of descriptive practices, and thus the ways libraries and users identify and describe the materials.
NoveList Database

All twenty of the recommended Bi-bliography books have a record in NoveList. Twelve of the twenty books have a sexuality described by subject (60%). Nine of twenty books had “bisexuality” in that subject description (45%). Four of twenty books have LGBTQIA fiction as one of their genres (20%) Thirteen of twenty books use character appeal terms to describe LGBTQIA diversity in general (65%).

Curiously, in direct contrast to every sampled public library catalog, *They Both Die at the End* is only identified as bisexual in NoveList. Also curiously, *The Gentleman’s Guide to Vice and Virtue*, universally described as bisexual in the public library catalogs, is not described with bisexuality by NoveList’s subjects, but “boy/boy relations” instead. Two of the books featuring women/women relationships (*The Life and Death of Sophie Stark* and *The Last Nude*) are only described as “Lesbians” for subject heading, though all of the women involved in the novel’s relationships are bisexual. *Passing Strange* is most accurately described, with both bisexual and lesbian identifiers.

See Table 6 for a summary of data from NoveList.

**Table 6: NoveList Database**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Record?</th>
<th>Relevant Subject Headings</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Appeal Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>An Unkindness of Ghosts</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Character: LGBTQIA diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Other Sexualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Everfair</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Her Body and Other Parties</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Life and Death of Sophie Stark</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lesbians</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Character: LGBTQIA diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Last Nude</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lesbians</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hild</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexual women</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Frog Music</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Passing Strange</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexual women</td>
<td>Lesbians</td>
<td>Lesbians, Men/women relations, Women/women relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>In One Person</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexual men</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Fifth Season</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Not Your Sidekick</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexuals</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Character: LGBTQIA diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Little &amp; Lion</em></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexual teenage girls</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Character: LGBTQIA diverse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Character: LGBTQIA diverse
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Adult</th>
<th>Teenage boy/boy relations</th>
<th>LGTBQIA fiction</th>
<th>Character: LGTBQIA diverse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Love in the Time of Global Warming</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Character: LGTBQIA diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gentleman’s Guide to Vice and Virtue</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Teenage boy/boy relations</td>
<td>LGBTQIA fiction</td>
<td>Character: LGTBQIA diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Other Lands</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexual teenage boys</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Character: LGTBQIA diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bisexual teenagers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like Water</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexual teenage girls</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Character: LGTBQIA diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They Both Die at the End</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexual teenage boys</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Character: LGTBQIA diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teenage boy/boy relations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otherbound</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Character: LGTBQIA diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pantomime</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Character: LGTBQIA diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Title</td>
<td>LGBTQA+ Presence</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Summer Prince</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bisexuality</td>
<td>LGBTQIA fiction</td>
<td>LGBTQIA diverse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

Out of one hundred total possible instances of recommended materials being present in the sampled public libraries, seventy titles were present, for an overall rate of 70%. Yet of those seventy materials collected, twenty-one were described with bisexuality-related subject headings, for a total of only 30%. Moreover, there are many levels of variance within the subject headings used. *In One Person* and *The Gentleman’s Guide to Vice and Virtue* were the only books consistently labeled with bisexual subject headings. However, even within these two titles, a variety of terms were used; some libraries described the books in multiple ways, such as using juvenile fiction subject headings or specifying when the book contained “bisexual teenagers” and “bisexual men” to help hone searches. Still, no library described every material the same way, or applied the same subject terms across these two sampled materials. The number of different subject headings used can be detrimental because of their inconsistent application rather than the use of synonyms (or “see also”), which can be programmed into a database’s search engine to automatically return synonymous results, such as “bisexuality” and “bisexuals”. Figure 2 and Figure 3 show the total number of different subject headings used to describe each novel, as well as the number of times a particular subject heading was used.
As a reader’s advisory database many libraries subscribe to, NoveList’s descriptive practices are better, though they still do not reach complete saturation of the
materials. Where the majority of the relevant description comes from the “Character” appeal term “LGBTQIA diverse,” this encompasses an enormous number of identities, and still was only applied to thirteen of twenty materials for a total of 65%. Also of interest are the materials where a sexuality subject term was applied though the “LGBTQIA diverse” character appeal term was not: *The Last Nude, Hild*, and *In One Person* all fall into this category. Where *Hild* and *In One Person* are correctly identified by various bisexual terms (though not all applicable terms, similar to the public library databases), *The Last Nude* is identified as “Lesbians,” presumably because the main romantic relationship is between two women, both of whom are bisexual.

The materials identified as “LGBTQIA diverse” had similar discrepancies within the more specific subjects. Four did not have any subject headings to specify how the characters were LGBTQIA diverse: *An Unkindness of Ghosts, Love in the Time of Global Warming, Otherbound, and Pantomime*. Various bisexual terms could have been applied to each of these titles, but *An Unkindness of Ghosts* and *Pantomime* feature intersex characters, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* and *Love in the Time of Global Warming* feature transgender characters, and *Otherbound* features disability as well as bisexuality.

Within the titles that did have bisexuality identified, some terms that could be applied are not in some cases, similar to the public library catalogs. Some items were labeled as “Lesbians” only: *The Life and Death of Sophie Stark* and *The Last Nude*. Although both books contain relationships between two female characters, all but one are identified as bisexual (aside from the love interest in *The Life and Death of Sophie Stark*, who is only identified as the protagonist’s girlfriend in the summary; her orientation is unknown). For this reason, at the very least, *The Last Nude* is actually misclassified,
while *The Life and Death of Sophie Stark* needs additional classification (and “Lesbians” may still be inaccurate; at the very least, the protagonist is bisexual, it is only her girlfriend who is a mystery).

Even if the proper terms are to be added, there are quite a few bisexual subject headings, and not all of them are consistently applied. In total, there are seven bisexual subject headings used: “Bisexuality,” “Bisexuals,” “Bisexual women,” “Bisexual men,” “Bisexual teenagers,” “Bisexual teenage girls,” and “bisexual teenage boys.” Figure 4 contrasts the number of bisexual subject headings applied per book versus the total number of appropriate subject headings (from the seven listed) available on NoveList.

![Bisexuality Subject Headings in NoveList](image)

*Figure 4: Bisexuality Subject Headings in NoveList*

In general, the reason one of the seven subject headings conceptually did not apply to every material was the adult/young adult divide (“bisexual men/women” versus “bisexual teenagers”) and/or gender (“bisexual women/teenage girls” versus “bisexual men/teenage boys”). Although many potential subject headings apply to every novel, at
most, a book had two present in either the public library or NoveList metadata. This could be for many reasons: describing too much in detail when the cataloger is unsure about the specific identities represented in the novel could do more harm than good. Similarly, some subject headings may simply be older parlance, and the difficulty of large-scale record management could interfere with the updating process; this is particularly true for the public library setting, where Library of Congress subject headings are used. These are slow to change and develop, whereas NoveList, as part of a private organization, can and does utilize its own descriptive methods for reader’s advisory purposes.

After examining the data from each of the three sources, many questions remain: in the public library and NoveList, how are determinations made between similar subject headings such as “bisexuality” and “bisexuals” when some records contain one subject heading and not the other? What about intersex or transgender characters? The Bi bliography specifies identity on a granular level with its tags such as “MC: cisgender bisexual woman” which, although potentially problematic when overlapped with other gender identities, is still more specific. However, it is often impossible to obtain that granular level of information from a publisher’s summary or trade reviews, which most librarians utilize to catalog and describe materials, whether in the public library setting or a database like NoveList.

Suggestions for Improvement

There is no prescription for the mercurial nature of language, just as it is impossible to eliminate the difficulty of identifying multiple gender attraction from a
publisher’s summary and a handful of trade reviews without devoting hours to a single book. However, consistency about the application of subject headings is entirely achievable. If the terms “bisexuals” and “bisexuality” are to remain in usage, both should be applied to materials featuring bisexual characters, rather than one or the other. The same applies to terms such as “bisexual teenagers” and “bisexual teenage girls,” if the character in question is both of these things. These are easy fixes to begin addressing some of the inconsistencies in metadata application for bisexual materials.

Similarly, on a conceptual level, application of identity-specific terms versus relationship-specific terms should be rigorously distinct. If a character’s orientation is indeterminate from the publisher’s summary or trade reviews, applying an incorrect label could cause myriad problems. As every sampled catalog demonstrated, some characters were incorrectly labeled as lesbian, gay, or straight instead of bisexual because the story was about a same-gender relationship. However, if a same-gender relationship is clearly part of the narrative, subjects such as “women-women romantic relationships” specify this without assigning a possibly incorrect orientation.

Overall, it is impossible to expect the same level of specificity and granularity a resource like the Bibliography provides in a library catalog devoted to all collected materials. However, it is entirely reasonable to consider improvements in the conceptual approach to catalog metadata, as well as better consistency in its application across materials.
Limitations

Because this study initially aimed to identify gaps and invisibility of bisexual/pansexual materials on an intersectional axis in public library catalogs, there were bound to be materials that slip through the cracks. To mitigate this, the recommended reading list of award-winning and award-nominated materials was selected for an exploratory study. More research is needed to expand these findings into explanatory fields, and another study may examine every material marked with bisexual subject headings to expand the findings and acquire more quantitative data.

Additionally, the limitations of purposively checking materials on a book list means that this study will not be generalizable to all bisexual materials in all public libraries in the United States. Because this is an exploratory study, generalizable conclusions need not yet be done, nor might they be appropriate when this study is interested specifically in the state of award-winning, recommended materials. By laying out the selection criteria and methods of data comparison and analysis, the skeleton of this study will be replicable and a sampling frame that includes all public libraries may be acquired and conducted.

Implications and Avenues for Further Study

The results of this study indicate the general state of bisexual/pansexual metadata description in public library catalogs with possible suggestions for improvement in both collection development and descriptive practices to allow users to properly seek out,
identify, and engage with appropriate materials. To expand the scope of this study, researchers may wish to take a more linguistic approach and examine the evolution of non-heteronormative language and how libraries may remain abreast of ever-evolving diction.

Additionally, an information science approach may attempt to search library catalogs for all non-heteronormative materials and compare results across identities. More intersectional work is especially needed, particularly to study the differences within materials on the axis of race and ethnicity.
Appendix A: The Recommended Book List

1. An Unkindness of Ghosts by Rivers Solomon

**Publisher:** Akashic Books

**Release year:** 2017

**Audience:** Adult

**Genre:** Science Fiction

**Publisher’s description:**

“Aster has little to offer folks in the way of rebuttal when they call her ogre and freak. She’s used to the names; she only wishes there was more truth to them. If she were truly a monster, she’d be powerful enough to tear down the walls around her until nothing remains of her world. Aster lives in the lowdeck slums of the HSS Matilda, a space vessel organized much like the antebellum South. For generations, Matilda has ferried the last of humanity to a mythical Promised Land. On its way, the ship’s leaders have imposed harsh moral restrictions and deep indignities on dark-skinned sharecroppers like Aster. Embroiled in a grudge with a brutal overseer, Aster learns there may be a way to improve her lot—if she’s willing to sow the seeds of civil war” (Akashic Books).

**Bisexual content:** The protagonist (Aster) is bisexual.

**Awards:**

2018 Locus Award Finalist (First Novel)

CLMP Firecracker Award Winner

John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer, Finalist

Lambda Literary Award Finalist, LGBTQ SF/F/Horror

A Stonewall Book Award Honor Book

Included in the American Library Association's GLBTRT 2019 Over the Rainbow List

2. *Everfair* by Nisi Shawl

**Publisher:** Tor Books

**Release year:** 2016

**Audience:** Adult

**Genre:** Alternate History / Historical Fiction / Steampunk

**Publisher’s description:**

“*Everfair* is a wonderful Neo-Victorian alternate history novel that explores the question of what might have come of Belgium's disastrous colonization of the Congo if the native populations had learned about steam technology a bit earlier. Fabian Socialists from Great Britain join forces with African-American missionaries to purchase land from the Belgian Congo's "owner," King Leopold II. This land, named Everfair, is set aside as a safe haven, an imaginary Utopia for native populations of the Congo as well as escaped slaves returning from America and other places where African natives were being mistreated. Nisi Shawl's speculative masterpiece manages to turn one of the worst human rights disasters on record into a marvelous and exciting exploration of the possibilities inherent in a turn of history. *Everfair* is told from a multiplicity of voices: Africans, Europeans, East Asians, and African Americans in complex relationships with one another, in a compelling range of voices that have historically been silenced. *Everfair* is not only a beautiful book but an educational
and inspiring one that will give the reader new insight into an often ignored period of history” (Macmillan).

**Bisexual content:** Multiple characters are bisexual.

**Awards:**

James Tiptree, Jr. Award Honor List

Nebula Awards – Nominee

Locus Awards - Nominee

3. **Her Body and Other Parties by Carmen Maria Machado**

**Publisher:** Graywolf Press

**Release year:** 2017

**Audience:** Adult

**Genre:** Fiction

**Publisher’s description:**

“In *Her Body and Other Parties*, Carmen Maria Machado blithely demolishes the arbitrary borders between psychological realism and science fiction, comedy and horror, fantasy and fabulism. While her work has earned her comparisons to Karen Russell and Kelly Link, she has a voice that is all her own. In this electric and provocative debut, Machado bends genre to shape startling narratives that map the realities of women’s lives and the violence visited upon their bodies. A wife refuses her husband’s entreaties to remove the green ribbon from around her neck. A woman recounts her sexual encounters as a plague slowly consumes humanity. A salesclerk in a mall makes a horrifying discovery within the seams of the store’s prom dresses. One woman’s surgery-induced weight loss results in an unwanted houseguest. And in the bravura novella “Especially Heinous,” Machado reimagines every episode of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, a show we naively assumed had shown it all, generating a phantasmagoric police procedural full of doppelgängers, ghosts, and girls-with-bells-for-eyes. Earthy and otherworldly, antic and sexy, queer and caustic, comic and deadly serious, *Her Body and Other Parties* swings from horrific violence to the most exquisite sentiment. In their explosive originality, these stories enlarge the possibilities of contemporary fiction” (Graywolf Press).
**Bisexual content:** Multiple characters are bisexual.

**Awards:**

*Winner*

National Book Critics Circle's John Leonard Prize / Shirley Jackson Award / Lambda Literary Award for Lesbian Fiction / Bard Fiction Prize / American Booksellers Association's Indies Choice Book Awards / New Atlantic Independent Booksellers Association's Book of the Year / Brooklyn Public Library Literature Prize / Bisexual Book Award for Fiction / Crawford Award

*Finalist*

National Book Award / LA Times Book Prize Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction / PEN/Robert W. Bingham Prize for Debut Fiction / World Fantasy Award / Kirkus Prize / Ferro-Grumley Award / Edmund White Award for Debut Fiction / Tiptree Award / Dylan Thomas Prize / Locus Award

4. **The Life and Death of Sophie Stark by Anna North**

**Publisher:** Penguin Random House

**Release year:** 2016

**Audience:** Adult

**Genre:** Women’s Fiction / Literary Fiction

**Publisher’s description:**

“Who is Sophie Stark? A brilliant filmmaker, a lover, a wife, a friend, a traitor. A troubled misfit who becomes a star, at great cost to the people who love her and, ultimately, to herself. Gripping and provocative, *The Life and Death of Sophie Stark* is a story of the power of art to transform lives and to destroy them, and of an artist’s drive to create something greater than herself, even if it means sacrificing everything—and everyone—she loves” (Penguin Random House).
**Bisexual content:** The protagonist (Sophie) is bisexual.

**Awards:**

2016 Lambda Literary Award for Bisexual Fiction

2015 Bisexual Book Award Nominee for Fiction

5. *The Last Nude* by Ellis Avery

**Publisher:** Penguin Random House

**Release year:** 2012

**Audience:** Adult

**Genre:** Historical Fiction / Literary Fiction / Romance

**Publisher’s description:**

“Paris, 1927. One day in July, a young American named Rafaela Fano gets into the car of a coolly dazzling stranger, the Art Deco painter Tamara de Lempicka. Struggling to support herself, Rafaela agrees to model for the artist, a dispossessed Saint Petersburg aristocrat with a murky past. The two become lovers, and Rafaela inspires Tamara’s most iconic Jazz Age images, among them her most accomplished—and coveted—works of art. A season as the painter’s muse teaches Rafaela some hard lessons: Tamara is a cocktail of raw hunger and glittering artifice. And all the while, their romantic idyll is threatened by history’s darkening tide. A tour de force of historical imagination, *The Last Nude* is about genius and craft, love and desire, regret and, most of all, hope that can transcend time and circumstance” (Penguin Random House).

**Bisexual content:** Both protagonists (Rafaela and Tamara) are bisexual.

**Awards:**

American Library Association Stonewall Fiction Award

Golden Crown Historical Fiction Award

Lambda Fiction Award Finalist
6. **Hild: A Novel by Nicola Griffith**

**Publisher:** Farrar, Straus and Giroux

**Release year:** 2013

**Audience:** Adult

**Genre:** Historical Fiction

**Publisher’s description:**

“In seventh-century Britain, small kingdoms are merging, frequently and violently. A new religion is coming ashore; the old gods are struggling, their priests worrying. Hild is the king's youngest niece, and she has a glimmering mind and a natural, noble authority. She will become a fascinating woman and one of the pivotal figures of the Middle Ages: Saint Hilda of Whitby. But now she has only the powerful curiosity of a bright child, a will of adamant, and a way of seeing the world—of studying nature, of matching cause with effect, of observing her surroundings closely and predicting what will happen next—that can seem uncanny, even supernatural, to those around her. Her uncle, Edwin of Northumbria, plots to become overking of the Angles, ruthlessly using every tool at his disposal: blood, bribery, belief. Hild establishes a place for herself at his side as the king's seer. And she is indispensable—unless she should ever lead the king astray. The stakes are life and death: for Hild, for her family, for her loved ones, and for the increasing numbers who seek the protection of the strange girl who can read the world and see the future. Hild is a young woman at the heart of the violence, subtlety, and mysticism of the early Middle Ages—all of it brilliantly and accurately evoked by Nicola Griffith’s luminous prose. Working from what little historical record is extant, Griffith has brought a beautiful, brutal world to vivid, absorbing life” (Macmillan).

**Bisexual content:** The protagonist (Hild) is bisexual.

**Awards:**

2013 Tiptree Honor Book

2013 Nebula Award for Best Novel Nominee

2014 Washington State Book Award for Fiction Winner

2014 ALA GLBTRT Over the Rainbow Project list, Fiction

2014 ALA RUSA Notable Book, Historical Fiction
7. *Frog Music* by Emma Donoghue

**Publisher:** Little, Brown and Company  
**Release year:** 2014  
**Audience:** Adult  
**Genre:** Historical Fiction  

**Publisher’s description:**

“Summer of 1876: San Francisco is in the fierce grip of a record-breaking heat wave and a smallpox epidemic. Through the window of a railroad saloon, a young woman named Jenny Bonnet is shot dead. The survivor, her friend Blanche Beunon, is a French burlesque dancer. Over the next three days, she will risk everything to bring Jenny’s murderer to justice—if he doesn’t track her down first. The story Blanche struggles to piece together is one of free-love bohemians, desperate paupers, and arrogant millionaires; of jealous men, icy women, and damaged children. It’s the secret life of Jenny herself, a notorious character who breaks the law every morning by getting dressed: a charmer as slippery as the frogs she hunts. In thrilling, cinematic style, FROG MUSIC digs up a long-forgotten, never-solved crime. Full of songs that migrated across the world, Emma Donoghue’s lyrical tale of love and bloodshed among lowlifes captures the pulse of a boomtown like no other” (Hachette Book Group).

**Bisexual content:** The protagonist (Blanche) is bisexual.

**Awards:**

- 2015 Stonewall Honor Book
- 2014 Bisexual Book Awards Finalist

8. *Passing Strange* by Ellen Klages
Publisher: Tor/Forge

Release year: 2017

Audience: Adult

Genre: Fantasy Fiction / Historical Fiction

Publisher’s description:

“San Francisco in 1940 is a haven for the unconventional. Tourists flock to the cities within the city: the Magic City of the World’s Fair on an island created of artifice and illusion; the forbidden city of Chinatown, a separate, alien world of exotic food and nightclubs that offer “authentic” experiences, straight from the pages of the pulps; and the twilight world of forbidden love, where outcasts from conventional society can meet.

Six women find their lives as tangled with each other’s as they are with the city they call home. They discover love and danger on the borders where magic, science, and art intersect” (Tor).

Bisexual content: One of the protagonists (Haskel) is bisexual; other characters may also be.

Awards:

WINNER, World Fantasy Award

WINNER, British Fantasy Award

WINNER, Gaylactic Spectrum Award

Finalist, Nebula Award

Finalist, Locus Award

Finalist, Bisexual Writers Award

Finalist, Mythopoeic Award

9. In One Person by John Irving

Publisher: Simon & Schuster
Release year: 2012

Audience: Adult

Genre: Fiction

Publisher’s description:

“A New York Times bestselling novel of desire, secrecy, and sexual identity, In One Person is a story of unfulfilled love—tormented, funny, and affecting—and an impassioned embrace of our sexual differences. Billy, the bisexual narrator and main character of In One Person, tells the tragicomic story (lasting more than half a century) of his life as a "sexual suspect," a phrase first used by John Irving in 1978 in his landmark novel of "terminal cases," The World According to Garp. In One Person is a poignant tribute to Billy’s friends and lovers—a theatrical cast of characters who defy category and convention. Not least, In One Person is an intimate and unforgettable portrait of the solitariness of a bisexual man who is dedicated to making himself ‘worthwhile’” (Simon & Schuster).

Bisexual content: The protagonist (Billy) is bisexual.

Awards:

2013 Lambda Literary Awards Winner in Bisexual Fiction

10. The Fifth Season by N.K. Jemisin

Publisher: Orbit Books

Release year: 2015

Audience: Adult

Genre: Fantasy

Publisher’s description:

“This is the way the world ends...for the last time.
A season of endings has begun.
It starts with the great red rift across the heart of the world’s sole continent, spewing ash that blots out the sun.
It starts with death, with a murdered son and a missing daughter.
It starts with betrayal, and long dormant wounds rising up to fester.
This is the Stillness, a land long familiar with catastrophe, where the power of the earth is wielded as a weapon. And where there is no mercy” (Hachette Book Group).

**Bisexual content:** Multiple characters are bisexual.

**Awards:**

2016 Hugo Award for Best Novel

2016 Sputnik Award

2016 Nebula Award Nominee

2016 World Fantasy Award for Best Novel Nominee

11. *Not Your Sidekick* by C.B. Lee

**Publisher:** Duet/Interlude Press

**Release year:** 2016

**Audience:** Young Adult

**Genre:** Fantasy

**Publisher’s description:**

“Welcome to Andover, where superpowers are common, but internships are complicated. Just ask high school nobody, Jessica Tran. Despite her heroic lineage, Jess is resigned to a life without superpowers and is merely looking to beef up her college applications when she stumbles upon the perfect (paid!) internship—only it turns out to be for the town’s most heinous supervillain. On the upside, she gets to work with her longtime secret crush, Abby, whom Jess thinks may have a secret of her own. Then there’s the budding attraction to her fellow intern, the mysterious “M,” who never seems to be in the same place as Abby. But what starts as a fun way to spite her superhero parents takes a sudden and dangerous turn when she uncovers a plot larger than heroes and villains altogether” (Interlude Press).

**Bisexual content:** The protagonist (Jessica) is bisexual.

**Awards:**
12. **Little & Lion by Brandy Colbert**

**Publisher:** Little, Brown Young Readers

**Release year:** 2017

**Audience:** Young Adult

**Genre:** Contemporary Fiction

**Publisher’s description:**

“When Suzette comes home to Los Angeles from her boarding school in New England, she’s isn’t sure if she’ll ever want to go back. L.A. is where her friends and family are (as well as her crush, Emil). And her stepbrother, Lionel, who has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, needs her emotional support. But as she settles into her old life, Suzette finds herself falling for someone new…the same girl her brother is in love with. When Lionel’s disorder spirals out of control, Suzette is forced to confront her past mistakes and find a way to help her brother before he hurts himself—or worse” (Little, Brown Young Readers).

**Bisexual content:** The protagonist (Suzette) is bisexual.

**Awards:**

2018 Stonewall Children’s and Young Adult Literature Award

13. **Love in the Time of Global Warming by Francesca Lia Block**

**Publisher:** Square Fish Books

**Release year:** 2013

**Audience:** Young Adult

**Genre:** Science Fiction

**Publisher’s description:**
"After the Earth Shaker, which all but destroyed Los Angeles, seventeen-year-old Penelope (Pen) sets out into the wasteland in search of her family, her journey guided by a tattered copy of Homer's Odyssey. Soon she begins to realize her own abilities and strength as she faces false promises of safety, the cloned giants who feast on humans, and a madman who wishes her dead. On her voyage, Pen learns to tell stories that reflect her strange visions, while she and her fellow survivors navigate the dangers that lie in wait. In her signature lyrical style, Francesca Lia Block has created a world that is beautiful in its destruction and as frightening as it is lovely. Love in the Time of Global Warming has shades of science fiction, fantasy, eco-fiction, and dystopic disaster" (Macmillan).

**Bisexual content:** The protagonist (Penelope) and her love interest (Hex) are bisexual.

**Awards:**

ALA Rainbow Project Book List

Green Earth Book Award Winner

YALSA Teens' Top Ten

14. **The Gentleman’s Guide to Vice and Virtue** by Mackenzi Lee

**Publisher:** Katherine Tegen Books

**Release year:** 2017

**Audience:** Young Adult

**Genre:** Historical Fiction / Fantasy Fiction

**Publisher’s description:**

“A young bisexual British lord embarks on an unforgettable Grand Tour of Europe with his best friend/secret crush. An 18th-century romantic adventure for the modern age written by This Monstrous Thing author Mackenzi Lee—Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda meets the 1700s. Henry “Monty” Montague doesn’t care that his roguish passions are far from suitable for the gentleman he was born to be. But as Monty embarks on his grand tour of Europe, his quests for pleasure and vice are in danger of coming to an end. Not only does his father expect him to take over the family’s estate upon his return, but Monty is also nursing an impossible crush on his best friend and traveling companion, Percy."
So Monty vows to make this yearlong escapade one last hedonistic hurrah and flirt with Percy from Paris to Rome. But when one of Monty’s reckless decisions turns their trip abroad into a harrowing manhunt, it calls into question everything he knows, including his relationship with the boy he adores” (HarperCollins).

**Bisexual content:** The protagonist (Monty) is bisexual.

**Awards:**

2018 Stonewall Honor Book

2017 GoodReads Choice Awards Finalist

Kirkus Prize Nominee

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15. **In Other Lands by Sarah Rees Brennan**

**Publisher:** Small Beer Press

**Release year:** 2017

**Audience:** Young Adult

**Genre:** Fantasy

**Publisher’s description:**

“The Borderlands aren’t like anywhere else. Don’t try to smuggle a phone or any other piece of technology over the wall that marks the Border — unless you enjoy a fireworks display in your backpack. (Ballpoint pens are okay.) There are elves, harpies, and — best of all as far as Elliot is concerned — mermaids. Elliot? Who’s Elliot? Elliot is thirteen years old. He’s smart and just a tiny bit obnoxious. Sometimes more than a tiny bit. When his class goes on a field trip and he can see a wall that no one else can see, he is given the chance to go to school in the Borderlands.

It turns out that on the other side of the wall, classes involve a lot more weaponry and fitness training and fewer mermaids than he expected. On the other hand, there’s Serene-Heart-in-the-Chaos-of-Battle, an elven warrior who is more beautiful than anyone Elliot has ever seen, and then there’s her human friend Luke: sunny, blond, and annoyingly likeable. There are lots of interesting books. There’s even the chance Elliot might be able to change the world” (Small Beer Press).

**Bisexual content:** The protagonist (Elliot) is bisexual.
Awards:
ALA Rainbow Book List
Georgia Peach Book Award Nominee
Florida Teens Read Award Nominee
ABC Best Books for Young Readers
Hugo & Locus awards finalist

16. Like Water by Rebecca Podos

Publisher: HarperCollins
Release year: 2017
Audience: Young Adult
Genre: Contemporary Fiction

Publisher’s description:
“In Savannah Espinoza’s small New Mexico hometown, kids either flee after graduation or they’re trapped there forever. Vanni never planned to get stuck—but that was before her father was diagnosed with Huntington’s disease, leaving her and her mother to care for him. Now she doesn’t have much of a plan at all: living at home, working as a performing mermaid at a second-rate water park, distracting herself with one boy after another. That changes the day she meets Leigh. Disillusioned with small-town life and looking for something greater, Leigh is not a “nice girl.” She is unlike anyone Vanni has met, and a friend when Vanni desperately needs one. Soon enough, Leigh is much more than a friend. But caring about another person threatens the walls Vanni has carefully constructed to protect herself and brings up the big questions she’s hidden from for so long” (HarperCollins).

Bisexual content: The protagonist (Savannah) is bisexual.

Awards:
2018 Lambda Literary Award for LGBTQ Children's and Young Adult
17. They Both Die at the End by Adam Silvera

**Publisher:** HarperCollins

**Release year:** 2017

**Audience:** Young Adult

**Genre:** Speculative Fiction

**Publisher’s description:**

“On September 5, a little after midnight, Death-Cast calls Mateo Torrez and Rufus Emeterio to give them some bad news: They’re going to die today. Mateo and Rufus are total strangers, but, for different reasons, they’re both looking to make a new friend on their End Day. The good news: There’s an app for that. It’s called the Last Friend, and through it, Rufus and Mateo are about to meet up for one last great adventure—to live a lifetime in a single day” (HarperCollins).

**Bisexual content:** One of the main characters (Rufus) is bisexual.

**Awards:**

YALSA 2018 Best Fiction for Young Adults

Kirkus Reviews Best Books of 2017, Teen Books

Goodreads Choice Awards 2017, Young Adult Fiction

18. Otherbound by Corinne Duyvis

**Publisher:** Abrams

**Release year:** 2014

**Audience:** Young Adult

**Genre:** Fantasy / Science Fiction

**Publisher’s description:**
“Amara is never alone. Not when she’s protecting the cursed princess she unwillingly serves. Not when they’re fleeing across dunes and islands and seas to stay alive. Not when she’s punished, ordered around, or neglected. She can’t be alone, because a boy from another world experiences all that alongside her, looking through her eyes.

Nolan longs for a life uninterrupted. Every time he blinks, he’s yanked from his Arizona town into Amara’s mind, a world away, which makes even simple things like hobbies and homework impossible. He’s spent years as a powerless observer of Amara’s life. Amara has no idea … until he learns to control her, and they communicate for the first time. Amara is terrified. Then, she’s furious.

All Amara and Nolan want is to be free of each other. But Nolan’s breakthrough has dangerous consequences. Now, they’ll have to work together to survive — and discover the truth about their connection” (Corinne Duyvis).

**Bisexual content:** The protagonist (Amara) is bisexual.

**Awards:**

2014 James Tiptree Jr. Award Nominee for Longlist

2014 Bisexual Book Award for Speculative Fiction

19. *Pantomime* by Laura Lam

**Publisher:** Pan Macmillan

**Release year:** 2016

**Audience:** Young Adult

**Genre:** Fantasy

**Publisher’s description:**

“Gene's life resembles a debutante's dream. Yet she hides a secret that would see her shunned by the nobility. Gene is both male and female. Then she displays unwanted magical abilities - last seen in mysterious beings from an almost-forgotten age. Matters escalate further when her parents plan a devastating betrayal, so she flees home, dressed as a boy.

The city beyond contains glowing glass relics from a lost civilization. They call to her, but she wants freedom not mysteries. So, reinvented as 'Micah Grey', Gene joins the circus. As an aerialist, she discovers the joy of flight - but the circus has a dark side. She's also plagued by visions foretelling danger. A storm is howling in from the past, but will she heed its roar?” (Pan Macmillan).
**Bisexual content:** The protagonist (Gene) is bisexual.

**Awards:**

2014 Sydney J. Bounds Best Newcomer Award, British Fantasy Society

"Teens Book of the Month" May 2014, Scottish Book Trust

American Library Association Rainbow List (2014, top ten title)

2014 Bisexual Book Award, Speculative Fiction (Winner)

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20. **The Summer Prince by Alaya Dawn Johnson**

**Publisher:** Scholastic

**Release year:** 2013

**Audience:** Young Adult

**Genre:** Science Fiction / Romance

**Publisher’s description:**

“The lush city of Palmares Tres shimmers with tech and tradition, with screaming gossip casters and practiced politicians. In the midst of this vibrant metropolis, June Costa creates art that's sure to make her legendary. But her dreams of fame become something more when she meets Enki, the bold new Summer King. The whole city falls in love with him including June's best friend, Gil. But June sees more to Enki than amber eyes and a lethal samba. She sees a fellow artist. Together, June and Enki will stage explosive, dramatic projects that Palmares Tres will never forget. They will add fuel to a growing rebellion against the governments strict limits on new tech. And June will fall deeply, unfortunately in love with Enki. Because like all Summer Kings before him, Enki is destined to die” (Scholastic).

**Bisexual content:** Multiple characters are bisexual.

**Awards:**

2013 Andre Norton Award Nominee for Young Adult Science Fiction and Fantasy

2013 National Book Award Longlist, Young People's Literature
Bibliography


