

Not Yet Out of the Closet: How the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Publishing Industry in the United States Affects Public Library Collections

Emilia R. Marcyk: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 501 E. Daniel St. Champaign, IL 61820, USA, marcyk2@illinois.edu

***Abstract:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) identities are becoming increasingly visible across American public spaces. Larger, non-specialty presses have begun publishing books by LGBT authors and with LGBT characters, filling a role traditionally played by small, LGBT-focused presses. However, in attempts to appeal to a non-LGBT audience, many larger presses have erased or downplayed LGBT identities in publisher-generated metadata and book jacket blurbs, making it difficult to determine LGBT content. This poster demonstrates that these changes have negatively affected the visibility of LGBT books in public library collections. By examining the subject headings attributed to books with LGBT characters or themes across eight mid-size American public library collections, the author found that books from large presses were less likely to be identified with LGBT-specific subject headings than their LGBT-press counterparts. Without indicative subject headings, access to LGBT fiction titles for patrons and librarians providing reader's advisory becomes difficult.*

Keywords: LGBT publishers, United States publishing industry, adult reading, metadata

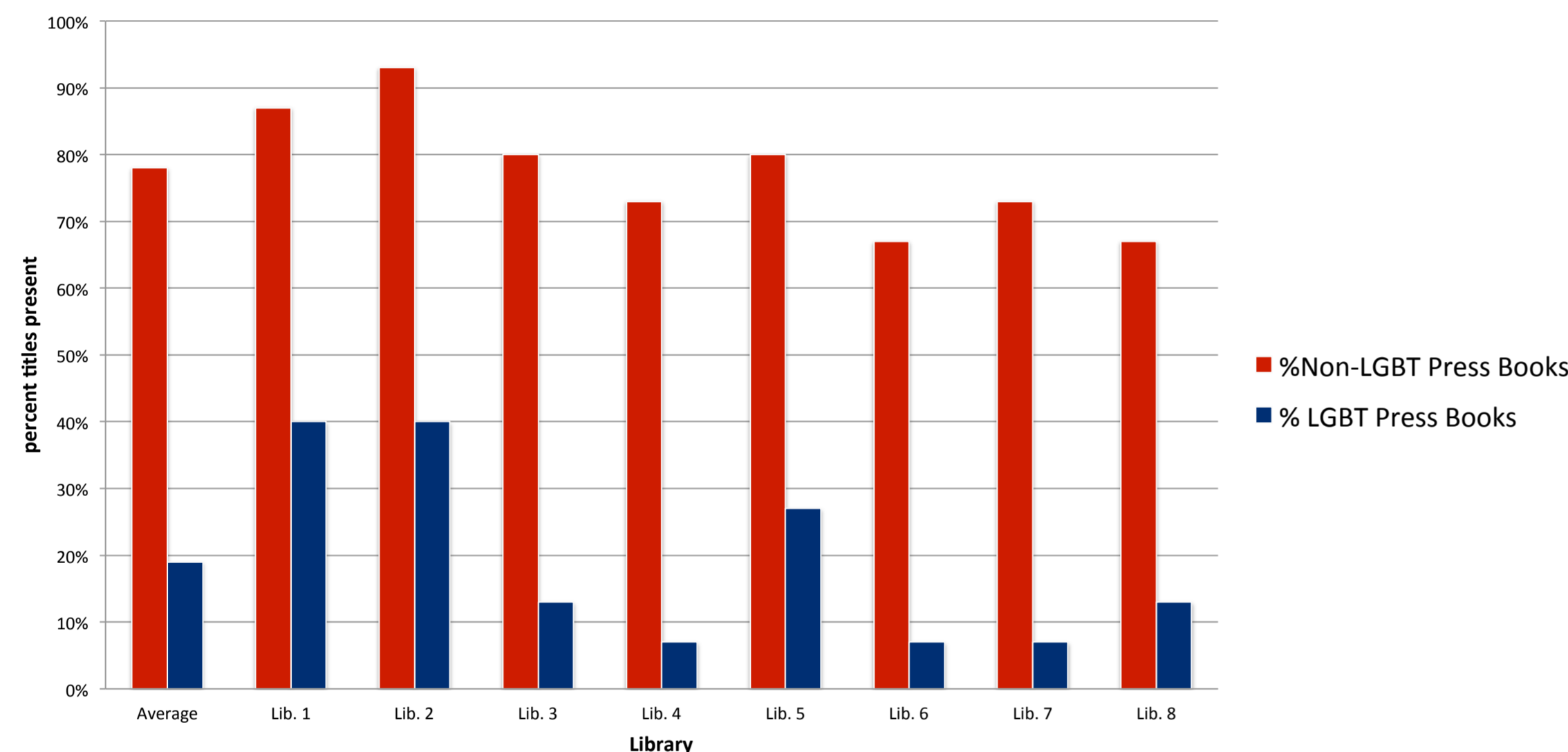
Not Yet Out of the Closet

How the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Publishing Industry in the United States Affects Public Library Collections
 Emilia Marcyk, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

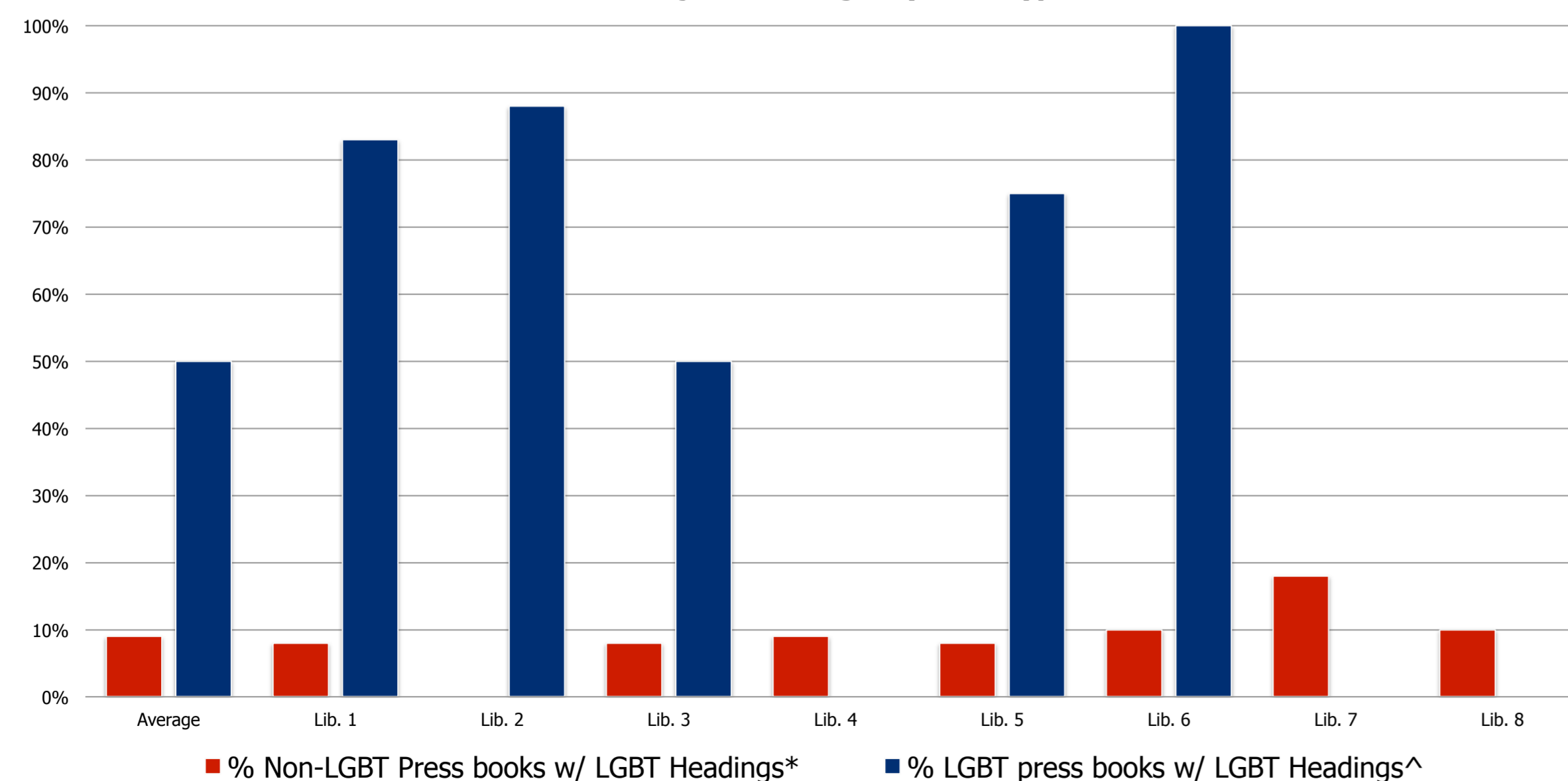
Method

The study examined the subject headings and patron-generated metadata (such as tags or lists) attributed to books with LGBT characters or themes across eight mid-size (in cities with 30,000 to 150,000 residents) American public library collections. Using a list of thirty award-winning or nominated books, fifteen from dedicated LGBT presses and fifteen from non-LGBT presses, the author looked for the presence of LGBT-related subject headings or patron-generated metadata in each of the eight online catalogs.

Presence of non-LGBT press and LGBT press books in library collections



LGBT subject headings, by book type



*Excluding patron-generated tags.

^Libraries 4, 7, and 8 had only one book from an LGBT press in their collection. Because the book did not have any LGBT subject headings, the average number may be artificially low.

The LGBT Publishing Industry, as Reflected by the Lammys

[Source: <http://www.lambdaliterary.org/awards/>]

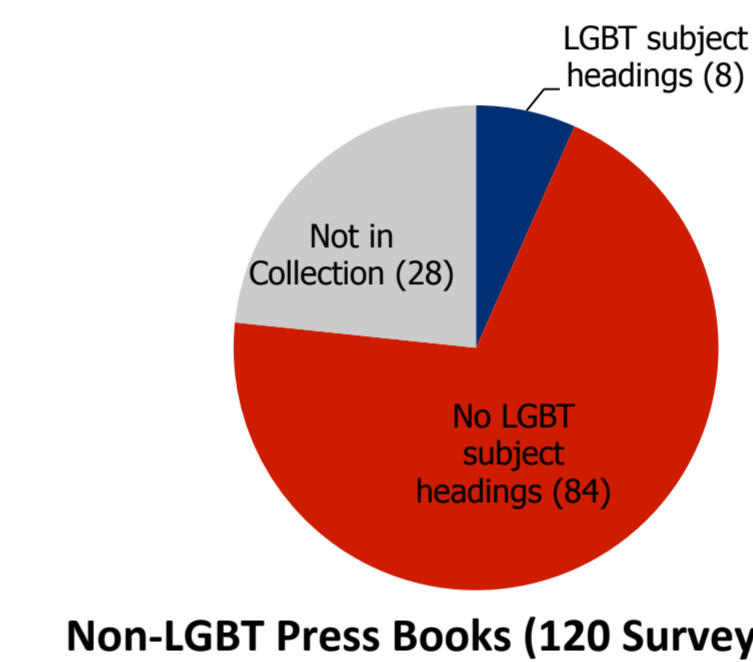
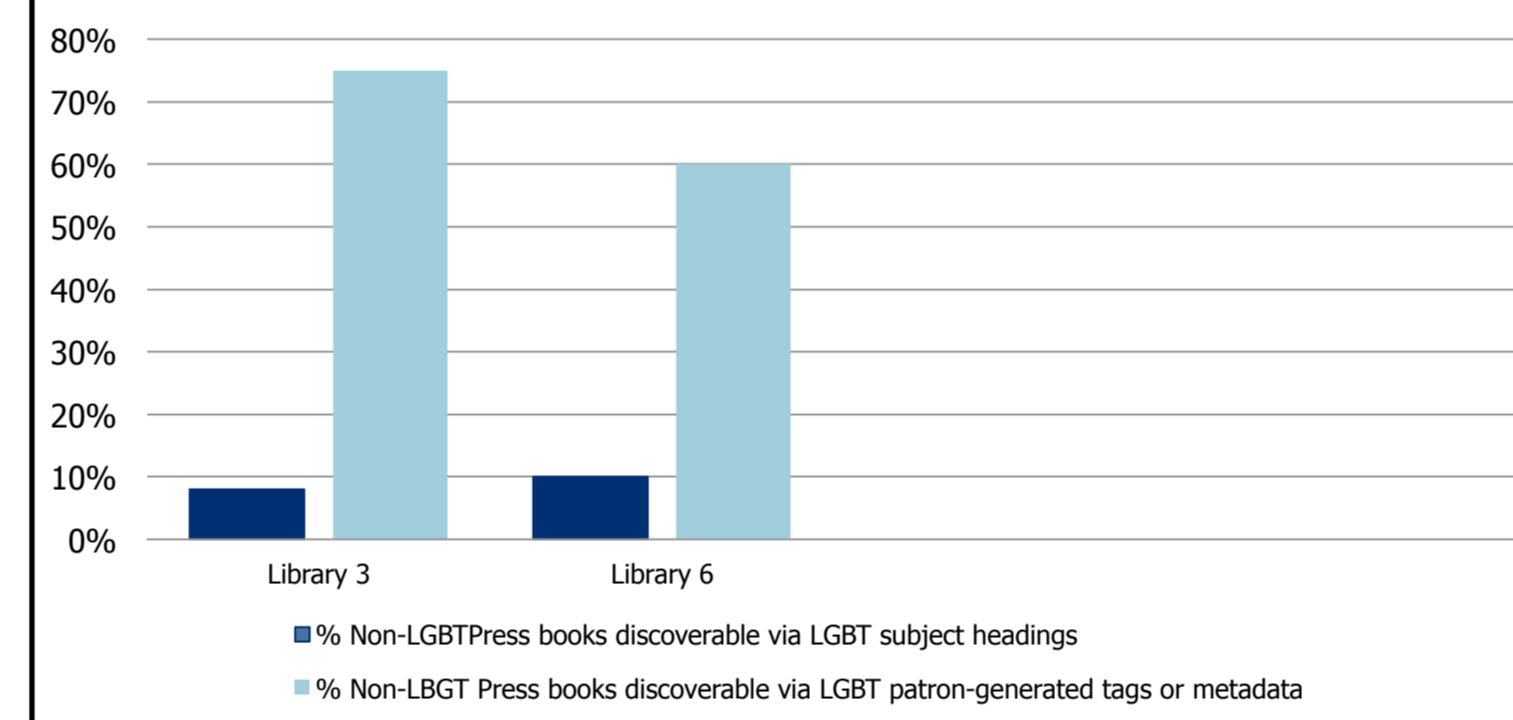
255 – The record-breaking number of publishers who submitted books to the 2012 Lambda Literary Awards (Lammys), the largest LGBT book awards in the United States (including self-published titles).

12 – The number of Lammy-nominated books published by the “Big Five” publishing houses (Hachette, HarperCollins, Penguin Random House, MacMillan and Simon & Schuster) in 2012.

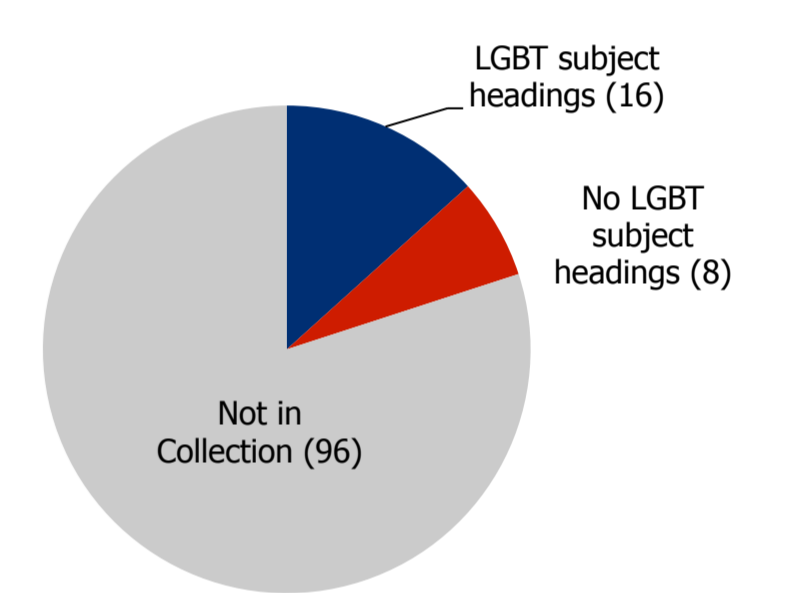
50%– Percentage of non-LGBT press books (compared to LGBT press books) nominated for a Lammy twenty years ago, in 1992.

67% - Percentage of books from non-LGBT presses nominated for a Lammy in 2012.

Discoverability of LGBT books from non-LGBT presses in libraries using a tagging system



Non-LGBT Press Books (120 Surveyed)



LGBT Press Books (120 Surveyed)

Discussion

Many mid-size libraries rely on suppliers such as Baker and Taylor or Bowker Books in Print for collection development. These suppliers often carry mainly books from large presses. Because most LGBT presses are small and independent, most book suppliers do not stock their books. The lack of books from LGBT presses in the collections surveyed likely reflects the overall difficulty acquiring these titles, rather than a hidden political agenda.

Even if librarians are unable to order large quantities of books from small presses, the absence of LGBT subject headings from the books that *do* make it into collections needs to be addressed. Patrons looking to read for pleasure or librarians performing reader’s advisory services may have difficulty finding titles if not accessible by subject.

Suggestions

- Since libraries with patron-generated tagging in their online catalogs have better identification of LGBT books, especially those from non-LGBT presses, track books that receive a large number of LGBT tags, and add appropriate subject headings to the catalog.
- Utilize list features in the catalog, and solicit lists from librarians and patrons.
- Professional development to increase librarian familiarity with LGBT presses and book awards.