RILA Bulletin, Special Edition

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/andria-tieman/59/
Greetings!

With the recent news of suicides and harrassment of the Gay and Lesbian community, we at RILA felt it necessary to emphasize the huge role we librarians can play in creating a safe, non-judgemental space for teens struggling with their sexuality, and to provide resources to educate ourselves and others.

We, as librarians, have a duty to create for all teens and young adults an unbiased place where they can come and access information in a safe setting. Everyone knows that being a teen and figuring out who you are is hard enough without fear of harassment and social ostracization. The resources provided in the sidebar of this Bulletin are for you to use and to share with anyone who expresses interest.

This is not a regular installment of the RILA Bulletin—the next regular issue will be in your inbox November 15th.

Thanks for reading,

Andria Tieman & Corrie MacDonald

A Safe Place to Be

By Jennifer A. Salcido

Library Patron & Guest Writer

Although the small decisions
Youth Pride, Inc.
YPI provides support, advocacy and education for youth and young adults throughout Rhode Island who are impacted by sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

PFLAG Providence
Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) is a national non-profit organization with over 200,000 members and supporters and over 500 affiliates in the United States. This vast grassroots network is cultivated, resourced and serviced by the PFLAG National Office, located in Washington, D.C., the national Board of Directors and 13 Regional Directors.

The Trevor Project
The Trevor Project is determined to end suicide among LGBTQ youth by providing life-saving and life-affirming resources including our nationwide, 24/7 crisis intervention lifeline, digital community and advocacy/educational programs that create a safe, supportive and positive environment for everyone.

Sex, Etc.
A teen sexuality website created by the Answer will always be there (Do I play the pronoun game during a business lunch?), I'm sort of done coming out. I'm almost 30, I'm engaged, I wear sensible shoes and anybody who knows me in the least bit has pretty much been able to figure it out. For me, coming out to other people—when I was ready—wasn't necessarily the hardest part. I only had about a year and a half of self-loathing and depression to get through before I was released to the magical world of college, where I found friends, support, and dates. The biggest obstacle, by far, was coming out to myself. This is not to say owning up to it; once I knew, I knew. Rather, the hard part was just giving myself the space to figure it out - and be okay with - whatever my life was going to look like.

Mostly this was mental space, but at some point, it became about seeking out a physical space. I needed somewhere to read and write and think that wasn't connected to anything in my day to day life - I needed somewhere that my friends wouldn't necessarily be (unless I asked them to be there), I needed someplace where there wouldn't be repercussions if anyone saw me reading a strange book, repeatedly looking up "homosexuality" in the dictionary, or crying into my Calculus homework. That space quickly became my local library.

I knew that, whatever was happening to me, it wouldn't be accepted by everyone, and I wasn't about to give anyone the chance to hurt me, to reject me, or start any rumors - life as a teenager is fragile enough, as we already knew, and are reminded of all too often of late. For kids like me - sort of quiet, studiously inclined anyway - the library was a perfect fit. Hiding out at the library might have started out as a closet for my closet, but it quickly became more than that. Before high-profile celebrities were popping up on Ellen to castigate bullies, before anyone was there to tell me it
program at Rutgers University, professional development opportunities in sexuality education for teachers and other youth serving organizations. Sex, Etc. has links to websites, hotlines, books, discussion forums and frequently asked questions all written for teens, and some by teens.

I'm from Driftwood
Launched in the Spring of 2009, IFD collects and shares true lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender stories from all over the world to help LGBT youth realize they're not alone. In the Fall of 2010, the IFD crew is embarking on an ambitious 4-month, 50-state Story Tour to collect and share more LGBT stories from the smallest towns and biggest cities across America. IFD claims LGBT people are everywhere. Now they’re out to prove it.

Teen Talk LGBTQ
plannedparenthood.org®, is the official gateway to the online Planned Parenthood community and to a wealth of reproductive health and rights information, services, and resources.

Boy Meets Boy
By Matthew Lawrence
Founder of Not About the Buildings

At first, the girl is visibly apprehensive. She is maybe fourteen years old, and she had asked the librarian for a book about love. Clearly she wasn't expecting him to return with Boy Meets Boy, David Levithan's cheery young adult novel about gay courtship in a utopian town. But after digesting the title, printed in candy hearts on the book's cover, she flips the book over to read the back. Then, a thoughtful decision made, she walks to the circulation desk.
It's 2004 and I'm at Teen Central, part of the now-shuttered Donnell Library Center in Manhattan. The room is full of teenagers and I'm slightly overwhelmed by the amount of media surrounding me. A movie is screening in one corner, computers are all occupied, kids are texting and we're all listening to an Of Montreal album (another of the librarian’s selections.) The scene with the girl and Boy Meets Boy is thrilling to watch, as a lover of gay teen lit; but it is no chance occurrence. I'm in New York to meet David Levithan, who is about to release his second young adult work, *The Realm of Possibility*.

Twenty vignettes about students at one high school, the book features lesbian and bisexual characters who are neither more nor less unhappy than anyone else. The author, a New Jersey-bred editor at Scholastic, was an integral part of the mid-decade zeitgeist in LGBT fiction, a movement that also included Brent Hartinger’s *Geography Club*, Alex Sanchez’s *Rainbow Boys*, and (my personal favorite) Billy Merrill’s poetry memoir *Talking In The Dark*. Over lunch, Levithan and I discuss being gay, our mutual love of early Alice Hoffman novels, and how lucky we are we grew up in liberal areas and that our own high school experiences were more or less unaffected by homophobia.

Earlier that same week, I had met two teenage boys who were not so lucky. Five years after finishing high school, in my last semester of college, I once again found myself in my high school library. The two boys, both fans of *Boy Meets Boy*, were trying to start a gay-straight alliance, and I was writing a complicated final paper about the intersection of literature and social work. My old principal, I was informed, was vehemently opposed to a gay-straight alliance, though the other public high school in our city had established a successful GSA years before. Several teachers told me anonymously that the principal had made inflammatory remarks about the issue at a faculty meeting, suggesting that "allowing gay kids of have a club" would open the doors for Jewish kids and skinheads to also start clubs. (The man has since, thankfully, retired.)
Still, even without a GSA, the kids felt comfortable discussing these issues with me in their school library. I learned about their personal lives, their school careers, and their hopes for the future. And not for the first time, I realized that the library is a perfect sanctuary for LGBT teens.

Ten years prior to this, as a seventh-grader, I was constantly worried about fights that always seemed to break out after school, most of which took place along my route home. My elementary school career had been a rather violent one--with me never on the winning end, more often than not forgetting to fight back at all--but as a child being gay had little to do with it. I was made fun of for being too tall, for being too smart, for being fat, for being terrible at sports, for having crushes on the wrong girls, for laughing too much, for not having friends, and for somehow always being in the wrong place when adults weren't looking.

By junior high, I got better at knowing who to avoid, and the setup of the school made this a little easier. Also, the school library stayed open for an hour after school let out, and I went there daily until the crowds cleared and I knew I could walk home safely. I read a lot--an exploratory mishmash of WB Yeats, Mary Higgins Clark and the newspaper--but more importantly I learned that libraries are safe places--spaces where people like me could feel welcome. Where we could have our own ideas without having to defend them to aggressive classmates. Where we could have alone time, without the burden of being at home.

I have always felt safe at the library, and by the end of high school I had learned a lot about gay history and culture from the books, movies and CDs that I had checked out over the years. I also learned how valuable a safe place to read can be.

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**Bullying in the Facebook Age**

*By Corrie MacDonald*

Reference Librarian, Warwick Public Library
Teenage cruelty is nothing new - most of us have stories of torment or alienation. Neither is the knowledge that homosexual teens are at a higher risk for harassment, depression, and suicide than their straight peers. What is new(ish) is social media, and the recent harassment and suicide of gay students represents a tragic confluence of these phenomena.

High school was certainly no picnic when I attended in the 90's, but the internet was only starting to light up on the cultural radar. Subsequent generations had email and instant messaging, and later MySpace and Facebook, to enhance their social lives and facilitate interpersonal torment. I'm honestly glad I didn't get my first email account until my freshman year at URI. Technology amplifies cruelty in a way that can be unbearable - but in a way that's also invisible to adults.

There is evidence that technology inhibits empathy for others, and it certainly seems to be the case in the rash of stories in the media about online bullying. While we would be remiss to grumble about "kids today", there seems to be new and more removed type of cruelty going on. Certainly it may seem impossible and naive to believe it's possible to eradicate all bullying, but as concerned adults we want to do something.

Gay and lesbian kids aren't the only ones being bullied, and the solution isn't so simple as "ban Facebook". The internet isn't going away, and social media isn't a passing fad. Young people will continue to adopt new technologies, whether we understand them or not.

What can we do? I don't have all the answers, or an idea of one thing that will fix it all, but I know that libraries should be a haven. Kids who can't deal with cafeteria politics retreat to the school library during their lunch period. They flock to the public library after school. Academic libraries welcome college students getting their first taste of adulthood. Directing gay teenagers to reliable sources of information about themselves and offering a safe and accepting space doesn't seem like nearly enough, but it's what we do as librarians.
About Us
The RILA Bulletin is produced by the RILA Communications Committee. The RILA Communications Committee is responsible for publicizing and supporting Rhode Island Library Association activities using a variety of communication tools. Responsibilities including publishing the RILA Bulletin, managing social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, and exploring other mediums as needed. The Communications Committee may cooperate with the publicity efforts of the Public Relations Committee to promote library services statewide.

Rhode Island Library Association members can contribute content to the RILA Bulletin by emailing the editors: rilabulletin@gmail.com

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RI Library Association

That's a start.