

# Queerly Evolving Professional Engagement: Reflections on Fifty Years of Book Awards

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## Abstract

The Rainbow Round Table (RRT) of the American Library Association (ALA), originally known as the Gay Task Force, has been actively standing against discrimination and advocating for LGBTQIA+ rights since 1970. Over the years, various RRT affiliates have contributed to myriad aspects of ongoing and emergent movements aligned with the pursuit of equality. These efforts have underpinned new perspectives, a broad spectrum of changes, queer progress, overcoming a range of challenges, and much joy. In the RRT context, book awards are particularly significant because of their enduring legacy and persistent impact. These awards serve as a focal point for this article, which presents a critical retrospective analysis emphasizing representation and intersectionality.

**Keywords:** community; intersectionality; literature; organization; representation

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## Introduction

The pursuit of human rights is a long, complex, and continuing story, which involves lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual/agender, plus (LGBTQIA+) individuals and communities. Queer struggles and achievements are inextricably intertwined with those of others engaged in the quest for equality (American Civil Liberties Union, 2021)<sup>1</sup>. One example of this is linked to librarians, library staff, and various affiliates of the Rainbow Round Table (RRT) of the American Library Association (ALA), originally known as the Gay Task Force. This group, formed as a section of the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT), has been standing up against discrimination and actively involved in progressive efforts for more than half a century (ALA 1971, 1990, 2006, 2008). This engagement has countered challenges, enabled dialogue, underpinned new perspectives, contributed to a broad spectrum of positive changes, and cultivated much joy. In the RRT realm, book awards are particularly significant because of their enduring legacy and persistent impact. Book awards serve as a focal point for this article, which presents a critical retrospective analysis emphasizing representation, synergy, and evolution. The study, drawing on decades of professional activity, is a novel contribution to the history of American librarianship, records of queer lives, and the potentials for future equity work in the field. While this exploration is based on experiences in the U.S., key issues such as gender, sexuality, and systemic bias have universal human relevance. As such, the discussion has the potential to increase understanding and inform practice across countries and contexts.

This article is divided into four main sections. First, frameworks are presented to ground the conceptual development. The second section introduces the early years of the Gay Task Force.

It considers some of the important work that took place throughout the 70s, 80s, and 90s in selecting titles for awards from a limited number and scope of publications—and within a challenging and sometimes hostile climate. A review of the aboutness of award winners provides details of emergent topics—what was included and what wasn't. A second data set exploring LGBTQIA+ authors deemed historically significant offers another perspective to consider sources of contributions to early queer literature regarding who was involved/included and who was not. Subsequently, drawing on the concept of intersectionality, more recent trends are considered through a synergy-based lens that promotes reflection on how some efforts and milestones both within the RRT and beyond are providing a base for expanding equity and momentum. The final section of the article revisits significant influences on the evolution of the RRT in terms of its persistence, scope, power, and impact. It also reviews some of the emerging and ongoing challenges to be faced by queer librarians and others committed to equity. A list of subject headings based on award winners from recent decades is also included as an appendix.

### Theoretical Framework

Debra Meyerson's concept of tempered radicals, which emphasizes how people create change within a professional context through focused engagement and small wins, provides grounding for this exploration (2001). Alex Poole's analysis of community protest information practices, which thoughtfully presents overlapping categorizations, provides an even more focused frame (2020). In Poole's model, book awards are considered a type of "constructive protest information practice" (p. 535). In generating and formally documenting information (via the awards, book lists, and other related initiatives), the Round Table contributes to developing a broader understanding of LGBTQIA+ existence and expands the credibility of queer perspectives, which may counter discrimination across diverse contexts. Activities in this grouping center around information "creating, seeking, scanning, exchanging, evaluating, recognizing, publicizing, publishing, disseminating, selecting, aggregating, lobbying, classifying, organizing, sharing, and curating" (p. 544-545). As the national diversity climate evolves based on pressure from various sources, so do the possibilities for action and inclusion in library and information science, both in publications and selection of works representing more diverse subjects. Over time, in reviewing the literature on the lack of diversity, many professionals and scholars have expressed challenges they have encountered and analyzed in terms of a lack of consistent representation and misrepresentation across varied literary and informational spaces. This kind of intellectual negligence is a symptom and reflection of systemic discrimination (Larrick, 1965; Sims Bishop, 1990; Cart & Jenkins, 2015; Meyers, 2014; Naidoo, 2014; Noble, 2018). Analyzing or confronting these challenges are also the focus of organizations such as American Indians in Children's Literature (AICL), the Cooperative Children's Book Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (CCBC, Tyner, 2018), and, more recently, We Need Diverse Books (WNDB). Countering these challenges can also grow from the impact of formally recognizing and celebrating diverse (non-mainstream) books through awards and other means such as lists and reviews (ALA, 2011; Reese, 2016).

Founded in 1970, the year 2020 marked the golden anniversary of the establishment of the ALA Gay Task Force, the nation's first LGBTQIA+ professional association (ALA, 2022). The year following its inception, the first "Gay Book Award" was presented at the Task Force's first annual meeting. The book award was conferred to *Patience and Sarah* by Isabel Miller, published by McGraw Hill. The work was originally self-published with the title, *A Place for Us*<sup>2</sup>. The nom de plume, Isabel Miller, was a pseudonym used by author Alma Routsong. A significant consideration is that the name "Isabel" is an anagram for the expression "Lesbia" (Katz, 1976). This context

of disembodied sexuality as expressed with the title and author name conveys an apt marker, or mirror, to begin reflecting on a spectrum of shifting representations, engagements, and synergies.

### GAY IS GOOD<sup>3</sup> - Frank Kameny

While the first Gay Book Award was presented for literature, subsequent awards over the next two decades emphasized informational works, albeit anthologies were included among the winners. Notable titles featuring diverse subject matter include:

- *Now the Volcano: An Anthology of Latin American Gay Literature* by Winston Leyland, in 1980, which, according to subjects listed in WorldCat, is about “Brazilian fiction and Gay men’s writings” and “Latin American - Translations”;
- *Black Lesbians: An Annotated Bibliography* by JR Roberts in 1982 about “African American legends”; and
- *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* by Walter L Williams in 1987 about “Indian Gays” and “Native peoples/Indians of North America -- Sexual behavior” and “Two-spirit people.”

The emphasis on non-fiction and the idea of including collected works among the winners indicates the fundamental nature of available (and acceptable) titles and a lack of (and acceptance of) diverse literature. During the early years of the RRT, diverse subjects, that is, options beyond a white, cis, male, hetero-patriarchal, diagnostic, and/or deficit framing, were limited. In an American professional context, providing access to these materials was very challenging. In many cases, users would need to seek alternative access routes to materials as it would have been impossible to locate items of interest via their local libraries. RRT affiliates had to provide compelling resources and offer enough energy and evidence to push other librarians into the unknown, and often uncomfortable - or even dangerous zones; compel them to (re)consider their professional responsibilities; and to seek ways to enable LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the context of navigating their own communities, many of which held hostile views and discriminatory policies and laws. These contexts stem from problematic histories, including those perpetrated by colonial misdeeds, and, unfortunately, they linger in both national and international contexts while laws reflecting contemporary beliefs and realities have yet to emerge (ILGA, 2021; Lambda Legal (2021); Movement Advancement Project, 2021; OECD, 2021).

Throughout RRT history, the Book Awards committees have been responsible for selecting books of exceptional merit relating to the LGBTQIA+ experience. This work has been full of opportunities and challenges related to shifting the boundaries of what should be included in collection development practice, collections, and ultimately communities. In the early years, materials were constrained by widespread shame and invisibility (D’Emilio, 1993). Extensive limitations surrounding queer identities and communities hampered the spectrum of reflections in literature. In tandem, the first Task Force/Round Table members, and other LGBTQIA+ folks, frequently faced considerable adversity based on their sexuality and/or gender identity/expression. Given the range of challenging circumstances, it is not surprising that awards were not given in a few of the early years (e.g., 1973, 1976, 1983). Still, they persisted. The work of the Task Force was not only groundbreaking and historically significant in facilitating collective action to enable more accurate representation and richer stories to flourish, but it

also has steadfastly served as a counterforce to mitigate misinformation and disinformation both within the ALA and beyond. As Johnson (2007) describes, a panel discussion sponsored by the RRT (then the Task Force) in 1971 criticized “sexist and homophobic labeling which then prevailed in the Library of Congress Subject Headings and the Dewey Decimal Classification.” These challenges and others extended across time and spaces. For example, decades later, in 1992, American Libraries, the flagship magazine of the ALA, published a photo of the Gay and Lesbian Task Force displaying a banner and marching in a pride parade on the cover of the July/Aug issue. The Association membership’s response to this was mixed, including accusations of being “in poor taste”, “glorifying homosexuality”, and indicative of involvement in the “lunatic fringe”. As Rosenzweig astutely responded, “Hatred of gays is seldom, if ever, an isolated, singular prejudice (such a polite word, “prejudice”). Anti-homosexual hatred in today’s political climate is linked to a whole nexus of bigotry and racism...” (Rosenzweig et al., 1992, page 840). Much work remained to be done within the profession and beyond. To counter these sorts of challenging circumstances, the persistence of the book awards as constructive protest—a channel to celebrate queer literature aligned with essential freedom of expression—provided an unwavering base from which to move forward.

Although it is not easy, especially in light of challenges like being attacked, within the context of critical scholarship and activism, it is important to recognize, probe, and continually work to overcome layers of embodied privilege. Within the Task Force, and later the Round Table, there are several power differentials—and some groups have been endowed with greater access, representation, or recognition(s) historically and systemically reinforced through hegemonic cultural practices of exclusion and discrimination. A simple example demonstrating this can be drawn from the group name where “Gay” was the only subgroup to be recognized/ included originally, whereas “Lesbian” was not incorporated until after fifteen years; “Bisexual” after twenty-five, and “Trans” not until after thirty years! These differences shine a light on general lack of awareness (Freire, 2000/1993), the official/professional focus and expression, and are indicative of evolving socially acceptable LGBTQIA+ group conceptualizations. This ongoing progress of inclusion speaks to relative socio-political relevance and begs the questions:

1. Who was engaged and was not engaged with the (round) table?
2. And, in the case of publications who had been deemed worthy—from both a socio-political and economic return sense—of seeing themselves in print?

Answers to both of these questions vary across the trajectory, but clearly, significant gaps are visible. In the following sections, these questions are explored in greater depth in the context of the RRT and broader literary landscape.

### Aboutness Considerations

In terms of the Book Awards, evidence related to these issues may be considered by examining the emergence and prevalence of the representative subject headings across the decades. As noted above, the scope was quite limited initially indicating that many topics we are familiar with today were not previously available for use. For example, according to WorldCat, in the 1970s, Award winner aboutness based on Library of Congress Headings included:

- Gay liberation movement -- United States.

- Gay men -- United States -- Biography.
- Gay men -- Literary collections.
- Gays -- Family relationships -- United States.
- Homosexuality -- Literary collections.
- Homosexuality -- United States -- essays.
- Lesbianism -- United States.
- Lesbians -- United States -- Fiction.
- Male homosexuality -- United States.

These initial subject areas prevailed in the early eighties, albeit with slight topical differences:

- Homosexuality in motion pictures.
- Homosexuality -- Miscellanea.
- Homosexuality -- Terminology.
- Lesbianism -- History.
- Lesbians -- Psychology.

During the first two decades of book awards, there was a lot of emphasis on gay men, homosexuality, and lesbians, but nothing about bisexual, trans, questioning, intersex, and other folks. Since catalogers, as a general rule, assign the most specific subject headings that describe the “aboutness” or significant content of the item, we know that works based on these other identities were largely absent.

There was a significant shift as the AIDS crisis dominated queer lives and literature by the late 1980s. The crisis caused a shift in “aboutness” apparent in subject headings, such as:

- AIDS (Disease) -- History.
- AIDS (Disease) -- Political aspects -- United States.
- AIDS (Disease) -- Social aspects -- United States.
- Gays -- Political activity -- United States.

During the next decade, subject headings emphasizing the lives of gays and lesbians and AIDS continued. Issues around families, youth, and coming out were prevalent; and topics like sports and the military were added. In 1994, *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg enabled trans consideration. And, in 1995, bisexuals were featured in *Chloe Plus Olivia: An Anthology of Lesbian and Bisexual Literature from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*, edited by Lillian Faderman. While the scope of early titles was limited, over time, more varied, nuanced, and inclusive

LGBTQIA+ representations continued to emerge from a widening range of available and acceptable publications (i. e., the literature) and the awards. This growth was also reflected in the higher number of books published with LGBTQIA+ content along with the establishment of separate Stonewall Awards for literature and non-fiction; and children's/young adult (YA) literature<sup>4</sup>. Decades later, in 2019, members of the Stonewall Book Awards Committee Children's and YA Literature Award considered these issues based on an analysis of trends across the previous decade. Not surprisingly, the scope had expanded considerably. Breitenbach noted, "we're seeing more books showing asexual, bisexual, and transgender experiences. Diversifying the pool of eligible titles racially in terms of characters and authors may be slower, and we can't always easily identify if authors identify as LGBTQIA+, but we are getting more own voices...." (GLBT News, 2019, para. 3) Ideas of inclusion were evolving and being incorporated into the Awards as reflections of broader environmental issues. This development can be observed from other angles, such as through an exploration of renowned LGBTQIA+ authors.

### Author Considerations

The Legacy Project, based in Chicago, provides rich grounds for additional consideration. The Legacy Project was conceived to memorialize historic figures by showcasing their contributions to world history and culture. It is a well-known and well-regarded source of information-and it includes a category for authors.

At the time of this study, Legacy Project database entries featured 92 authors—51 male, 40 female, 0 other, and one not identified. In terms of orientation—44 gay, 30 lesbian, one straight, one queer, 15 bisexual, 0 asexual, and 0 unknown. In terms of gender identity, there were 88 cisgender, two transgender, 0 genderqueer/non-binary, and 0 intersex, and one not identified. Trans author representation was shallow— only two percent. These percentages echo trends seen in the subject groupings of early RRT awards. We can hypothesize that they reflect relative numbers of (well-known) LGBTQIA+ authors as well as their relative prominence, which was likely tied to publishing (i.e., sales) potential. Understanding these issues is complicated by the dynamic nature and socio-cultural constraints of naming and categorization of identity constructs, limiting our ability to understand the whole picture, which is also true of the RRT subjects presented above. The distribution of Legacy Project author ethnicities provides an additional viewpoint to inform this discussion. It is shown in Figure 1.

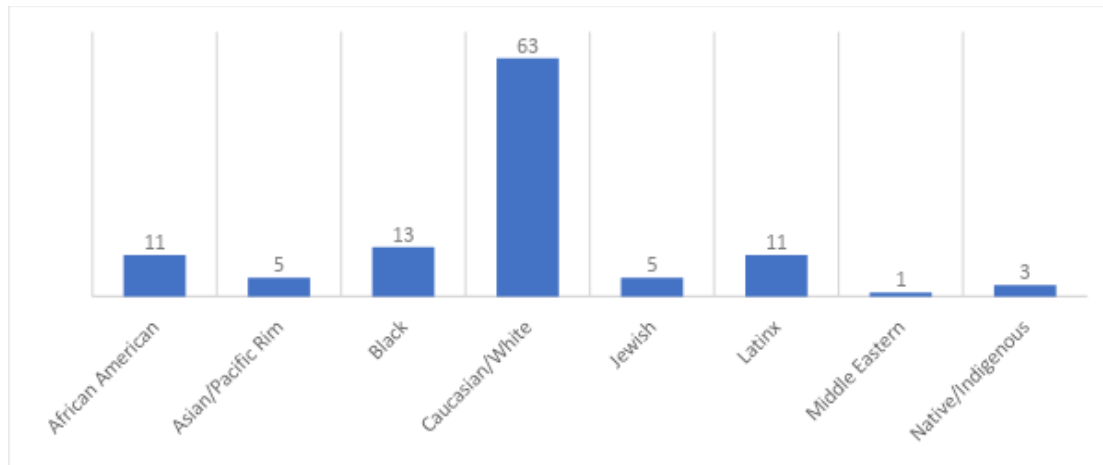


Figure 1. Distribution of Legacy Project Authors by Ethnicity

This illustrative data, based on a total of 112 ethnicities identified for the 92 world-renowned LGBTQIA+ authors identified by the Legacy Project, reveals that the majority, >56%, were identified as white. This distribution is actually, and perhaps surprisingly, entirely aligned with recent national census data demographics in terms of “Race and Hispanic Origin”—and could be further considered and analyzed in the more complex global context (United States Census Bureau, Morning, 2008). In shifting back to the focus on queer realities reflected in the Stonewall Awards, the increased representation of diverse LGBTQIA+ lived experiences is evident in a gradual expansion of the scope of literature and publications evident in Award winners (and honor books). Again, these can be seen more clearly through additional review of the topics included in subject headings. More examples of emergent subjects from 1991-2020 are included in Appendix A. A review of this list also leads to more questioning around vocabularies and the identities of those who were and were not included.

Throughout this period, conversations focusing on diverse representations were also expanding and evolving within other areas of ALA in light of persistent diversity gaps. For example, in recognition of this detrimental trend, the ALA Executive Board approved the launch of the Spectrum Initiative at the Spring Meeting, 1997. The Spectrum Scholarship Program, as it is known today, “provides leadership in the transformation of library services” and is arguably one of the most significant (diversity-based) recruitment efforts in the profession’s history (Prellwitz, 2018; Hathcock, 2015). Under an umbrella of diversity, equity, and inclusion as part of the evolution of the Awards and beyond, fundamental issues of intersectionality have come into focus and deserve, more significant consideration<sup>5</sup>.

### Intersectional Realities and Synergies

Intersectionality is a term coined by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. It is a concept that echoes foundations established across the ages to describe and illuminate how oppressions (sexism, homophobia, transphobia, racism, ableism, classism, xenophobia, etc.) interconnect and reinforce each other—and, as such, need to be holistically examined and rejected. The term was recently added to the Merriam-Webster dictionary in 2020 (Geek Feminism, 2021; International Women’s Development Agency, 2021).

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As the work of the Stonewall Awards Committees does not exist in a vacuum, a review of some more examples of recent events and efforts demonstrating or reinforcing the complexity of the movement can offer essential insights related to our collective resistance and power both from within and beyond the Round Table, ALA, and LGBTQIA+ communities.

Emerging organizational initiatives expand on previous understanding and efforts—and serve as new markers and mirrors, to compel and enable us to embody, reflect, and generate new and more tremendous energy. Several include examples from social media, which recognize trends of increasing use and reliance in terms of access to news and as part of informing and enabling collective action (Schaeffer, 2019; Auxier, 2020). Highlights based on a selective sampling of diverse recent events and efforts of varied origin, format, scope, and scale that have contributed to increasing visibility, critical awareness, awakening, and new movement grounded in expanding intersectional synergies stemming from library and information science and LGBTQIA+ affairs include:

- In 2011, California passed the Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act (Senate Bill 48), the first law in the U.S. compelling the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ content into public school curriculum (Equality California, 2011). Other states (e.g., New Jersey, Colorado, and Illinois) have since passed similar laws - as have other countries, such as Scotland (National Improvement Hub, 2021).
- Dan Savage keynotes the ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans, featuring his recent book, *It Gets Better*, inspired as an effort to quell LGBTQIA+ youth suicide. (American Libraries, 2011)
- The Over the Rainbow (OTR) Book List Committee was approved as a standing round table committee at the GLBT-RT Membership Meeting during the 2011 ALA Annual Conference. OTR is charged with developing “an annual, annotated bibliography of books for general adult readers aged 18 years or older that have commendable literary quality and significant, authentic LGBTQIA+ content” to “to promote the improved quality and accessibility of LGBTQIA+ literature.” OTR is an expansion of the highly successful Rainbow Book List, featuring books recommended for young readers, which began as a grassroots effort sponsored by the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) in 2007 (ALA, 2021).
- In 2011, the Mike Morgan and Larry Romans Children's & Young Adult Literature Award was incorporated into the ALA Youth Media Awards (YMA; Johnson, 2011).
- In 2012, Dr. Kristopher Wells, Director of the Institute for Sexual Minority Study and Services (iSMSS) launches the #nohomophobes Twitter tracker and response to homophobic language on social media. (Crawshaw, 2012).
- The Center for the Study of Multicultural Children's Literature established an annual best multicultural books list at the in 2013.
- In 2019, Jack van der Wel and Ellen Greenblatt expanded the Homosaurus, an international linked data vocabulary of LGBTQ terms originally created in 1997 to support improved access to resources. In 2015, with input from K. J. Rawson, the resources would move online - enabling even broader access (Walker, 2019).



- The LGBTQ+ Special Interest Group (SIG) - sponsored by the Acquisition and Collection Development Section - launch by the International Federation of Library Associations and Organizations (IFLA) in 2014 (Montague, 2015).
- We Need Diverse Books (WNDB, @diversebooks), the non-profit and grassroots organization of children's book lovers, dedicated to "producing and promoting literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people" was established in 2014. WNDB echoes the voices of many critically aware scholars in asking people to "imagine a world in which all children can see themselves in the pages of a book."
- The first #critlib unconference took place in conjunction with the Association of College and Research Libraries conference in Portland, Oregon in 2015. Critlib, a shorthand for critical librarianship, "is a movement of library workers dedicated to bringing social justice principles" into library work. The #critlib hashtag is used to facilitate information sharing and ongoing conversations.
- In 2015, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Foundation's Welcoming Schools Program Jazz & Friends National Day of School and Community Readings. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) now serves as an official co-sponsor. <https://www.welcomingschools.org/resources/books/welcoming-schools/international-jazz-friends-school-and-community-readings> (Habley, 2021)
- The organization formation of the nonprofit Joint Council of Librarians of Color (JCLC, Inc.) in 2015 to "advocate for and address the everyday needs of the American Library Association ethnic affiliates.
- The 2015 creation of the #OwnVoices hashtag by writer Corinne Duyvis in referring to "an author from a marginalized or under-represented group writing about their own experiences/from their perspective, rather than someone from an outside perspective writing as a character from an underrepresented group."
- While ALA meetings always provide much food for thought and renewed commitment and energy for our work, in 2015, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of marriage equality in tandem with the ALA Annual Conference in San Francisco, the intensity was off the charts. The atmosphere in the city and at the meeting was extremely joyful and memorable. RRT members joined local librarians in the annual Pride March, and responses to media about the event were overwhelmingly positive. A photo of the librarian contingent is included below.
- In 2015, a new campaign to recognize June as GLBT Book Month was launched. As of 2020, this is known as Rainbow Book Month.
- Drag Queen Storytimes were initiated on December 12th, 2015, at the Eureka Valley/Harvey Milk Memorial Branch Library. They would soon spread across the nation and beyond in public libraries and other community-based venues. (Montague & Latham, 2019).
- Research on Diversity in Youth Literature (RDTL) was founded as an open-access online in 2016 "by a group of activist scholars who embody, research, and foreground

- diversities, inclusivity, advocacy, and visibility for a scholarship that is not always privileged/acknowledged within academia. RDYL's mission "is to publish scholarship attending to issues of diversity, equity, social justice, inclusion, and intersectionality in youth literature, culture, and media."
- The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion (*IJIDI*) launched its first issue in 2016. *IJIDI* (*IJIDI*) is an open-access online journal seeking "to expand the discourse on how access to, interaction with, and the use of information by a range of populations can impact individuals, communities, and society."
  - The GLBT-RT Advocacy Committee published *Open to All: Serving the GLBT Community in Your Library*, a toolkit "providing GLBT-friendly programming helps your community know that you are welcoming and accepting" in 2016.
  - ALA Council recognized pulse Nightclub mass shooting victims at the Annual Conference, which took place near the tragic event in Orlando. (ALA, 2016)
  - As a consequence of the racial injustice and library response in Ferguson and Baltimore, the ongoing Dakota Access Pipeline protests, the Pulse Nightclub mass shooting, and the 2016 Election result, the (recently amalgamated) ALA Office for Diversity, Literacy, and Outreach Services (ODLOS)'s expanded the #librariesrespond social media effort into a comprehensive online source of news and resources to support libraries in responding to critical issues (Cottrell, 2015).
  - In 2016, the Invisible Histories Project was established to preserve the history of LGBTQ life throughout the U.S. Southeast.
  - At the ALA Midwinter meeting in 2017, a new nametag ribbon inviting attendees to write in their own pronoun(s) became available.
  - A new version of the pride flag that added black and brown stripes to the top of the standard six-color flag to draw attention to Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) issues within LGBTQ communities was adopted by the city of Philadelphia in 2017 (Tringali, 2021).
  - The American Association of School Libraries (AASL), with support from an ALA Emerging Leaders team, published a guide to support school librarians in providing access to LGBTQ+ materials in schools.
  - The American Library Association Council adopted a resolution on June 26, 2018, to supply gender-inclusive restrooms at all ALA conferences. The Round Table had advocated for them, and they had appeared before this resolution. (GLBT News, 2014)
  - In 2018, two ad hoc Round Table committees were established. The Archive Project Committee would continue the oral history toolkit featuring Round Table members and begun by a 2018 Emerging Leaders team. The other, the 50th Anniversary Golden Jubilee Committee, would oversee preparations for a grand celebration at the ALA Annual Conference in Chicago in 2020. While the Jubilee ultimately has had to be postponed because of public health restrictions, both of the groups and related efforts have

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provided important new spaces for thoughtful reflection about the past, present, and future of the Round Table (Vess, 2018).

- In 2019, after two decades as the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Round Table, the group voted to change its name for the fifth time. The membership voted to adopt the unifying Rainbow Round Table handle over another extension of individual letters (Ford, 2020).
- In March 2020, a pandemic emerged. Life as we knew it was turned upside down.

The effects are unprecedented, trauma-inducing, and far-reaching. They have forced everyone to reflect, reconsider, and reorganize our daily activities and our basic understandings across many contexts, including access to resources and services.

As a consequence, ALA conferences became virtual in summer 2020. While the reality of not seeing friends and colleagues has been difficult, adjusting to an online format did increase possibilities for access and engagement. In addition, ALA and SRRT both implemented initiatives to enable “members who have been recently furloughed, laid off, or are experiencing a reduction of paid work hours” to participate at no cost (D. Margarida, personal communication, January 7, 2021)<sup>6</sup>.



Figure 2. A banner promoting GLBT Book Month and a fabulous librarian/reader participating in the 45th annual San Francisco Gay Pride parade, June 28, 2015. Source: Rae-Anne Montague

These highlights, based on numerous recent events and related efforts across diverse realms, serve as new and important access points and pathways to focus on and guide more equity-based and unifying thoughts and actions. Their meanings and reflections are powerful. They open up possibilities and represent important intersectional aspects of our collective history providing stepping stones and scaffolding for increasing motivation and more positive actions moving forward. They are also reflected in our lexicon and language-in seeing the shift from terms like safe spaces to brave spaces; less focus on allyship and more emphasis on #ownvoices; increasing concern with microaggressions, and, as Reese so astutely describes, the ongoing need for maintaining some limitations. (Arao & Clemens, 2013; *Writing the Other*, 2016). Each of the areas above, their impacts, as well as additional and emerging examples, may be considered in tandem with initiatives such as the Stonewall Book and other Awards-such as Lambda Literacy and more, (2021) and/or within the enduring and broader landscape of LGBTQIA+ library work (e.g., GLSEN, 2021; *Libraries and the LGBTQ Community*, 2021). All are deserving of additional consideration, which lies beyond the scope of this article.

### Toward Future Possibilities

In 2020, Barbara Gittings, arguably the Round Table's most enduring and influential leader, was included in Time's 100 Women of the Year feature for her groundbreaking efforts in promoting understanding among marginalized people. Her efforts were based on her belief that before "they can prevail, they must understand that they are worthy and that they are not alone" (Time, para. 1). This prestigious recognition serves as a reminder of Gittings' prowess stemming from her self-knowledge and self-acceptance. Despite not having studied librarianship, which is often considered detrimental in library and information science leadership situations, her vision and enduring commitment and engagement enabled the successful launch of the Task Force. They spawned a plethora of "good trouble."<sup>7</sup> Her attitude, knowledge, and skills allowed her to persist as a tempered radical—and also serve as another example of the importance of synergies existing beyond librarianship that contribute to our evolution and success.

Gittings' influence was even evident at the most recent in-person gathering of the RRT, which took place at the 2020 ALA Midwinter Meeting. The social event, featuring the adult Stonewall Awards announcements, was held at the Independence Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia, which aptly includes the Barbara Gittings Gay/Lesbian Collection. A photo from this event is included below.



Figure 3. Friends and colleagues gather at the RRT Social in Philadelphia, January 26, 2020. Source: Rae-Anne Montague

In addition to Gittings, many other fabulous Round Table leaders (and members) have also embodied incredible leadership qualities and enabled critical progress. Those worthwhile discussions extend beyond the scope of this article.

At this time in our history, reflection leads us to recognize and appreciate the broad range of ideas, efforts, and accomplishments of RRT leaders and members in conjunction with others from diverse LGBTQIA+ and equity-based organizations that have enabled many positive changes. At the same time, it is remarkable how much adversity remains—and that LGBTQIA+ community members (as well as others who have been historically marginalized in the U.S and beyond) are still faced with overt and covert discrimination and violence. These challenges and struggles are

manifest both within and beyond our professional realms. For example, recent controversies around trans-exclusive rhetoric and practice are linked to broader anti-trans politics. Such politics have necessitated the development of more thoughtful and informed considerations and responses, such as the ALA Office for Diversity, Literacy, and Outreach Services' (ODLOS) online resource, *Libraries Respond: Protecting and Supporting Transgender Staff and Patrons* (ALA, 2020). Other organizations, like the Feminist Library in the U.K., and many professionals and scholars have also come forward and offered critical policies and perspectives (Feminist Library, 2021; Pearce, Erikainen & Vincent, 2020; Sumpter, 2020; Ylanan, 2021).

As indicated above, having LGBTQIA+ books with award-winning status may be considered a constructive protest information practice. These materials serve as both a conversation starter and a counterforce to overcoming bias in the form of persistent homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and so on, manifest as censorship. That said, a quick check of the ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF's) 2019 list of top challenged books reveals that eight out of ten emerged because of their LGBTQIA+ content—even though half had been recognized with the Stonewall Book Awards, namely *George* by Alex Gino; *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out* by Susan Kuklin; *Sex is a Funny Word* by Cory Silverberg and Fiona Smyth; and *Drama* by Raina Telgemeier (2019b). In light of this, it is clear that many more conversations linked to ongoing constructive protest work in conjunction with other synergistic efforts, diversity-based educational pathways, progressive policy implementations, and so on, are still needed.

As we move toward an increased understanding of queer lives and literature in the context of the necessary and significant role story plays in our shared humanity, there is cause for celebration regarding how far we have progressed to date. The Stonewall Book Awards have played a significant role in accepting queer literature, and in a broadening sense, lives. As such, they embody pride—and also reinforce the importance of ongoing critical review. The strength of our work grows foundationally within the context of diverse representation, intersectionality, and solidarity. Along with evolving and unified actions and initiatives, diverse viewpoints and voices grounded in social justice will continue to focus and guide greater understanding. This process is not always linear—and will undoubtedly need to accommodate setbacks and new challenges.

Moving into the sixth decade of Stonewall Awards, the selection work and other RRT committees, supporters, and affiliates are challenging, meaningful, and exciting. New growth is necessary and imminent. Discussions about adding a new award for poetry and a plan to formally separate the children's and young adult recognitions based on the increasing volume of books have already begun. Review of materials in other formats is also growing and evolving. The RRT remains in solidarity with other groups within ALA and beyond—committed to augmenting diverse representations and intersectional growth to promote and sustain human rights for all. Round Table members can look forward to continued remote engagement and more gatherings in person again as it is safe to do so. In the meantime, LGBTQIA+ librarians and supporters persist across time, space, and media. Looking toward the future, queerly evolving professional considerations, conversations, and collaborations will undoubtedly continue to grow and flourish. A lot has happened already, and in the wise words of RRT member Michael Mungin, “the round table’s work is nowhere near finished” (Ford, 2020).

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In this article, the word “queer” is used as a substitute for LGBTQIA+. The intent is to use an affirming, community-based term that encompasses diverse members. For more on terminology, see <https://www.nlgja.org/stylebook/?s=queer>

<sup>2</sup> A timeline of early Round Table History based on Cal Gough’s chronology found in the conference publication for the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Task Force: 25th anniversary, 1970-1995 gala published by ALA is available at the RRT website - <http://www.ala.org/rt/rrt/about/history>. Information about Stonewall Awards, including links to WorldCat entries, is available chronologically on the RRT website: <http://www.ala.org/rt/rrt/award/stonewall/honored>.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Kameny, considered one of the most influential figures in the U. S. gay rights movement, coined the phrase GAY IS GOOD in 1968, patterned after the phrase Black is Beautiful. <https://makinggayhistory.com/podcast/episode-1-5/>

<sup>4</sup> Categories for fiction and non-fiction were distinguished as part of the Gay and Lesbian Book Award in 1990. Bisexual was added to the Award context and name in 1994, and Transgender followed in 1999 when the Task Force also evolved into a group with Round Table status. In 2002, the Award names were changed to recognize two of the group’s founders - the Stonewall Book Award-Barbara Gittings Literature Award and the Stonewall Book Award-Israel Fishman Non-Fiction Award. In 2010, a category was added to separate books for young people with the launch of the Stonewall Book Award-Mike Morgan and Larry Romans Children’s & Young Adult Literature Award. From 1990-2000, one winner and four finalists were selected for fiction and non-fiction Awards (i.e., ten titles recognized/year). Starting in 2001, the finalists became known as Honor Books.

<sup>5</sup> While sex, sexuality, and gender identity and expression have been considered in terms of RRT leadership and award criteria during the group’s history, an exploration of other facets of diversity within the RRT membership, leadership, or, in alignment with this exploration, the Stonewall Committees, all of which appear to be majority white, would add to further understanding these issues. This could potentially be challenging because of the unknown availability of historical demographic data.

<sup>6</sup> Margarida, Danielle (OLIS), M. (2021, January 7). [Young Adult and Children’s Services Discussion List] F.W.: [EXTERNAL] : [yscon] SRRT sponsoring gift ALA memberships - deadline January 11 at noon C.T.

<sup>7</sup> Inspired by Rosa Parks, former U.S. Representative and civil rights icon John Lewis spoke about getting into “good trouble.” Learn more here: <https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2020/07/remembering-john-lewis-the-power-of-good-trouble/> and here: <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/remembering-john-lewis/>

## Appendices

### Appendix A - Additional Examples of Subject Headings Representing Diverse Identities/Groups Used for Stonewall Book Awards Classification (1991-2020)

- Male homosexuality -- China -- History. (1991)
- Lesbianism -- China -- History. (1991)

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- Zuni Indians -- Sexual behavior. (1992)
  - African American gays -- Literary collections. (1993)
  - Mexican Americans -- Literary collections. (1994)
  - Hispanic American gays -- Poetry. (1995)
  - Race relations -- Fiction. (1996)
  - African American women -- Civil rights. (1999)
  - African American poets. (1999)
  - African American gays -- Poetry. (2000)
  - African American families -- Fiction. (2000)
  - Filipino Americans -- Fiction. (2003)
  - Japanese American families -- Fiction. (2004)
  - African Americans -- Biography. (2004)
  - Vietnamese fiction. (2004)
  - India -- Fiction. (2006)
  - African American gays -- Fiction. (2008)
  - Gender identity -- South Africa. (2010)
  - African American gay men -- Fiction. (2010)
  - Immigrant children -- Juvenile fiction. (2012)
  - Latin Americans. (2013)
  - Mexican Americans -- Fiction. (2013)
  - African American gay men. (2013, 2017)
  - Homosexualité -- Aspect religieux -- Islam. (2015)
  - African American women -- Fiction. (2016)
  - African American teenage girls -- Juvenile fiction. (2016)
  - Gay men -- Arab countries -- Fiction. (2017)



- African American transgender people. (2018)
- Sri Lankans -- United States -- Fiction. (2018)
- Asian Americans -- Poetry. (2018)
- Immigrants -- Poetry. (2018)
- African American lesbians. (2019)
- African American girls -- Juvenile fiction. (2019)
- Ethnic relations. (2020)
- African American authors -- Biography. (2020)

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