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Street lit novels are reemerging in popularity. Their content is as controversial as it was in the late 1960s and 1970s when Iceberg Slim and Donald Goines were writing their similar black experience novels. Despite their controversy, major publishers sign the authors and bookstores carry the titles. Public libraries also strive to provide popular books for their patrons. This research examines whether public libraries in the Triangle-area of North Carolina own bestselling street lit titles.

Headings:

Street Lit

Black literature/Evaluation

Chiles, Nick

Publishers and publishing/Black literature

Public libraries

Collection development/Policy statements

STREET LIT NOVELS AND TRIANGLE-AREA PUBLIC LIBRARIES: A SEARCH  
THROUGH THE OPACS (ONLINE PUBLIC-ACCESS CATALOGS)

by  
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## **Introduction**

Adult fiction books are staple items in most public libraries. Therefore, it is important for librarians to ensure that multiple genres are represented. This allows for a variety of choices for patrons. Since public libraries serve such diverse communities, collection building decisions are challenging, especially in relation to genre fiction materials. This point emphasizes that the librarians must keep aware of new genre development. “Street lit” falls into the category of a “new” genre in that it is reemerging onto the publishing scene.

Fiction books about African-American life in inner-cities written by African-American authors grew in popularity in the late 1960s and early 1970s. One of the most well-known authors is Robert Beck who wrote under the pseudonym Iceberg Slim. Another renowned author is Donald Goines who wrote under his own name, in addition to the pseudonym Al C. Clark (Goode, 1984). This category of fiction was named “black experience novels” (Goode, 1984, p. 41). The popularity of the fiction genre waned following the untimely death of Goines in 1974. Now the genre of fiction is known as street, ghetto, hip-hop, gangsta or urban lit/fiction. Rapper and activist Sister Souljah reignited interest in this genre with the 1999 release of her book, The Coldest Winter Ever: A Novel. She tells the story of Winter Santiago, the spoiled 15-year-old daughter of a rich New York City drug dealer who is caught and incarcerated, and her attempts to survive on the streets following the disintegration of her family (Barnes & Noble.com, <http://search.barnesandnoble.com/booksearch/isbnInquiry.asp?z=y&isbn=0671025368&>

[itm=1](#)). Following the commercial success of Souljah's book, many new authors are entering the street lit genre. Like Slim and Goines, most of them are ex-convicts whose stories are based on their real life experiences. These authors are both male and female. Generally, the street lit writers are not formally trained.

The books contain explicit sexual and violent content in their depictions of African-American life in inner cities. Initially, publishers rejected manuscripts by these new writers. As a result, many authors decided to self-publish their books as an alternative to traditional publishing. Several of them distributed their books on the streets, at beauty salons and at car washes in their hometowns and in other cities. The books were passed around among friends. They became underground bestsellers. Their success in this arena convinced mainstream publishers that these books potentially could sell well with the general public. The publishers signed books deals with some popular street lit authors.

As the big publishing houses accept street lit, they make the books available to retailers and public libraries. Retailers have them available to purchase, but are public libraries providing street lit books for their patrons? The purpose of the research is to answer that question.

## **Literature Review**

Street lit books are controversial because of their explicit content, which also contributes to their popularity. They have their critics and supporters. The following review offers definitions of the street lit genre, describes its audience and its appeal factors, discusses its rise to mainstream recognition and provides people's viewpoints about it within the book industry, revealing the positive and negative aspects of street lit.

The genre does not have a standard definition. However, some commentators of the genre have compiled definitions of street lit. They are:

- "...[L]argely self-published tales of crime, drugs and violence by young black authors—many of whom spent time on urban streets and wrote their novels behind bars..." (Patrick, 2003, p. 31).
- "They are page-turners rife with violence, sex and crime; they're often populated by African American characters; they're especially popular among reluctant readers, notably including young black men; and the language, cadences, subject matter and aesthetic evoke comparisons to hip-hop music. The books also tend to have a following in jail..." (Marech, 2003, p. A1).
- "The telltale signs [of a street lit novel] usually include a shut-your-mouth title, straightforward sentences, vast amounts of drugs, sex and rap music and varying degrees of crime and punishment. An exemplary tale is a mixture of foul language, flying bullets, fast cars, a flood of drugs, fallen angels and high-priced frippery. It venerates grams over grammar, sin over syntax, excess over success" (Weeks, 2004, p. C01).

The common elements among these definitions are the African-American authors and characters, the urban settings, the prominence of drugs, violence, sex and crime.

These elements are important in the methodology development of the research. If they appeared in the books' subject headings, then those books were selected for searching.

Since the genre has reemerged recently in a relative sense, street lit is known by various names. For the remainder of the paper, the genre is going to be called street lit to reduce confusion and because it is a commonly used term. When Slim and Goines were writing, the genre was known as “black experience novels” (Goode, 1984, p. 41), and was influenced by the black memoirs and autobiographies of the 1960s and the blaxploitation movies of the 1970s. The dichotomous mix of hip-hop slang and the jargon of the publishing industry have resulted in multiple names for the genre. According to Bynoe (2006), critics do not agree with the use of the term ‘hip-hop’ in describing these books because they do not include any aspect of hip-hop culture, such as rap music. The opponents of the descriptions ‘hip-hop lit’ or ‘hip-hop fiction’ believe that hip-hop is being used as synonyms for “Black and urban” (Bynoe, 2006, p. 172). In contrast to this point, Murray offers a quote from Vickie Stringer, street lit author and co-founder of Triple Crown Publications, stating “[w]hat we write is not urban fiction. It’s not street fiction. It’s hip-hop” (2004, p. 28). Stringer views these books as part of the hip-hop culture, implying that people who like hip-hop music enjoy books of this genre. Jones also quotes Stringer, “[i]t’s hip-hop fiction, because it’s mirroring the things you saw in the music...” (2004, p. E1). Therefore, according to Stringer, the content of street lit books shares similarities with hip-hop music lyrics. Obviously, these similarities are not enough for the critics that Bynoe discusses to accept the genre as a part of hip-hop culture.

Another aspect of street lit that is implied in the motivations of its characters is called the “double bind effect” (K. E. Campbell, 2005, p. 94-95). The double bind is the perception that the only way to make a lot of money (or to be successful) in the streets or

in the ghetto is to resort to illegal means. If one does not choose this route, then he or she cannot make a lot of money and is viewed by others as unsuccessful. The assumptions are that committing crimes for profit or being unsuccessful are the only two choices available, that no other options exist. In his book, Campbell (2005) discusses this effect in the context of the black experience novels of Goines and Slim. Since street lit novels are so similar to their works, the effect also translates to the “new” genre. The characters in the street lit novels are involved in illegal activities in order to be “successful”. This sense of helplessness drives the books’ characters to risk their lives and their freedom in order to succeed. If the double bind effect extends from fictional characters to real people in its reflection on society, then it is this author’s opinion that this perception could motivate actual people living the street life to commit illegal acts for money.

Writers who cover the topic of street lit provide multiple age ranges for this genre’s audience. Murray quotes Joylynn Jossel, an author whose street lit stories are published by Triple Crown Publications, who says that street lit appeals to “young adults ages sixteen to twenty-five” (2004, p. 28). O’Briant refers to a quote by Malaika Adero, a senior editor at Atria Books—a division of Simon & Schuster, “[t]he ages [of readers] range from teens on up to people in their 40s” (Feb. 2004, p. 14NE). Jones (2004) writes that Lloyd Hart of Black Library Booksellers says that mostly women, aged fifteen to thirty-five, purchase street lit titles from his kiosk. Venable quotes street lit author Nikki Turner who classifies her audience as “ages fifteen to twenty-five” (2004, p. 24). Stovall (2005) indicates that African-American women and girls between ages thirteen and thirty purchase most of the street lit titles. Since the books appeal to teenagers, the issue of whether their subject matter is appropriate for young readers is an area of debate.

Stovall (2005) reports on parents' views concerning their children's reading street lit books. Their opinions range from those who are excited that their children are reading books at all to those who do not want their children reading books with adult-level material. Patrick says that "...some booksellers find these titles cause for concern, given that they appeal largely to young women under 30..." (2003, p. 31). Marech (2003) writes that some Juvenile Hall of Alameda County (CA) employees believe that street lit books glorify criminal activity so they discourage their circulation. They are concerned that the young people could be influenced by the books' messages. Parker includes Villarosa's concerns that young people are reading these books that contain the same "sex, thugs, drugs and profanity" (2003, p. 7A) as hip-hop music. However, Villarosa believes that the books draw young people who would not read books of other genres. African-American fiction author Nick Chiles comments that street lit books "glorify and glamorize black criminals" (2006, p. A15), and criticizes the portrayal of African Americans by these authors. He is concerned about "the sexualization and degradation of black fiction" (2006, p. A15). Chiles believes that street lit authors are providing their readers with the most terrible aspects of the African-American culture. It brings into question whether these authors are responsible for offering a balance between the good and bad of African-American culture. Nick Chiles offers his perspective on the readers of street lit:

I've heard defenders say that the main buyers of these books, young black women, have simply found something that speaks to them, that it's great that they're reading something. I'd agree if these books were a starting point, and that readers ultimately turned to works inspired by the best that's in us, not the worst. (2006, p. A15)

Stovall (2005) also writes that young African-American men are also reading books from this genre. Since young African-American men generally are disinclined to reading fiction, this is a major development. Kim Campbell quotes Duke University professor Mark Anthony Neal who agrees that the content of street lit books should be viewed critically, but he also says that “[i]f it [street lit] helps young blacks and others to develop an interest in literature and writing, then I think it serves a higher purpose regardless of the content” (2004, p. 11). None of the available literature determines if readers of street lit books “advance” to books of higher literary standing, or if they are satisfied with street lit as only a source of entertainment. This argument has involved different genres with romance novels being the most prominent. The answer is that only readers are qualified to decide what they want to read.

The books appeal to readers. In Kim Campbell’s article (2004), Professor Mark Anthony Neal opines that street lit books allow readers to visit the rough streets of inner-cities vicariously, which he believes is also part of the appeal of hip-hop music. Rhone (2004) reports that the realistic storylines of street lit novels attract its readers. The characters usually are not enlightened by their experiences. If they survive the novel, they are left in the same or worse situations at the end. This adds to the realism of the stories.

The authors and editors of street lit books contend that their messages offer the realities of street life. K. E. Campbell believes that someone who knows the risks and consequences of “The Life” (2005, p. 105), making money on the streets through illegal means, is effective in keeping others from making the same mistakes when they share their experiences. Court (2003) writes that Shannon Holmes, author of popular novel B-More Careful, accurately portrays drug dealers and addicts in order to dissuade his

readers from making the same mistakes as his characters. Holmes wrote B-More Careful while serving prison time on drug charges. El-Amin (2006) reports that street lit author and publisher Vickie Stringer classifies her books as cautionary tales. Stringer's first book, Let That Be the Reason, is a partially autobiographical work that she wrote at the end of her prison term. She served a seven-year sentence for selling drugs and pandering. According to Medina (2005), Nikki Turner, another popular author, writes her novels from second-hand experience. Her stories are just as popular as the authors who write from first-hand knowledge. Turner shows her readers the good and the bad of living the street life--the money, cars and jewelry acquired through criminal activities come at a steep price. In relation to their content and young audiences, street lit novels face similar lines of reasoning for and against hip-hop music.

Nick Chiles was disturbed to see street lit books under the "African-American literature" sign at a Borders Book store that he visited. They were mixed in with books written by him, Terry McMillan and other popular African-American authors. He considers books of this genre substandard partly because of their graphic content, as demonstrated by the "lurid book jackets displaying all forms of brown flesh, usually half-naked and in some erotic pose, often accompanied by guns and other symbols of criminal life" (2006, p. A15). In a Library Journal editorial, Fialkoff (2006) disagrees with Chiles. She believes that the genre is no more graphic than current romance novels in sexual content or than thrillers in their violent content.

The books have also received criticism for their poor quality of writing. In Medina's (2004) article, author Nikki Turner acknowledges the inconsistencies in the storylines and the typographical and grammatical errors that appear in her early books.

She states that she could not be both the author and editor of her novels. She blames the substandard writing on having her books published by a small press, Triple Crown Publications, who considered getting the books to press more important than correcting the writing mistakes. Now Turner is an author for a major publishing house where the editing process is stricter. Goode (2004) writes that Donald Goines's books received similar criticisms concerning literary standards during his time. Scholars now praise his works. This author deduces that there is the possibility that literary critics may praise street authors for their stories in the future just as they did with Goines. Chiles (2006) expresses apprehension over the future of African-American literature as a whole since street lit novels lack high-quality writing. The Essence magazine's bestselling book lists of fiction contain mostly street lit titles. Therefore, Chiles believes that authors of "meaningful" works are unable to compete with street lit since these books infrequently appear on Essence's lists.

Based on their success as self-published novels, several street lit books currently are published by mainstream publishing houses. In Murray's article (2004), Vickie Stringer self-published her first book, Let That Be the Reason, after the major publishers rejected her manuscript in 2001. Vickie Stringer claims that she sold 1,500 copies of her book in three weeks. She also publishes other authors for her company, Triple Crown Publications. El-Amin writes that Stringer agreed to "...a six-figure deal for two books with Atria Books, a division of Simon & Schuster", in 2004 (2006, p. 49). Even though she has her own book deal, she continues to run Triple Crown Publications. Angel (2004) indicates that Shannon Holmes sold 150,000 copies of B-More Careful and 85,000 copies of Bad Girlz after signing with Atria Books. Bartz (2005) quotes Nikki Turner's

manager, Marc Gerald who says that her books, A Hustler's Wife and A Project Chick together sold 150,000 copies. In Medina's article (2004), Turner claims that she sold 1,500 copies of her book, A Hustler's Wife, on the street in the first week. Her books were published by Triple Crown Publications before she signed a book deal with One World, a Random House imprint. Buffalo News (New York) reports that 50 Cent, a hip-hop artist, is taking part in producing "hip-hop novellas and graphic novels" (2005, p. C3). Pocket/ MTV Books are going to publish street lit featuring former members of the G-Unit rap crew. Nikki Turner will write the first of the novellas, which will be published in 2007. Street lit author Dewitt Gilmore, who writes under pseudonym Relentless Aaron, signed a four-book deal for six figures with St. Martin's Press. He wrote books Push, Topless and Platinum Dolls. He claims that he has sold 200,000 books before his book deal (Kilgannon, 2006). African-American authors who write in other genres are interested in the street lit genre. Carl Weber, an African-American author and bookstore co-owner, started a publishing house, Urban Books in 2002 (Rhone, 2002). He is better known for writing drama-filled books about male and female relationships, including Lookin' for Luv (2000) and Preacher's Son (2005). Weber has a deal with the Kensington Publishing Corporation (his publisher) to distribute books published by Urban Books (Rosen, 2004). Urban Books publishes works of interest to African Americans, including street lit titles. This publishing house had \$2 million in sales its first year (Rhone, 2002). Bestselling author Omar Tyree is known for writing books about male-female relationships that appeal mostly to female readers, including Flyy Girl (1997). In an effort to gain more male readers, Tyree adopted the pseudonym The Urban Griot. Under this name, he writes books with explicit language and violence. Simon &

Schuster publishes both Tyree's books and those written by The Urban Griot (Angel, 2004). As illustrated, mainstream publishers signed street lit authors and added street titles to their rosters after realizing that the books had a large, underserved audience and the potential for profitability.

Since street lit novels reappeared in places outside of the mainstream scope, it is likely that patrons are the force behind librarians adding these books to their libraries' collections. Most libraries have established collection development policies. However, challenges may arise if the policies are not adaptable to changes, such as the introduction of "new" genres. Anjejo (2006) advises that these policies should be flexible to accommodate changes in the libraries' needs. She recommends that library personnel continually evaluate their collections in regards to circulation statistics and "patron input" (p. 14). Requests from patrons are valuable in creating the "perfect" collections.

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this research is to determine if public libraries are making street lit titles available to their users. As interest builds for these books, the libraries should ensure that they are accessible to the members of their communities according to Policy 1 of the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights:

I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation. (<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/statementsif/librarybillrights.htm>, 2006)

The method used to conduct the research was a qualitative study using the content analysis approach to determine if libraries are providing popular street lit for their patrons.

The first step was choosing titles that represent the street lit genre. The titles were chosen from Essence magazine. This magazine is popular with African-American women and girls, who are the main purchasers of street lit books. It offers a monthly book bestseller list with retail sales data from independent African American bookstores. The sales reports provide information on the book purchases of the stores' customers. All of the bestseller lists from 2004 were selected because most of the articles about street lit books were written during that year, indicating the height of the genre's popularity among mainstream newspapers and magazines. The public awareness of the books would have been high at this time due to the media's coverage of the street lit genre.

The next step was to review the books' subject headings. The subject headings were checked in the *WorldCat* database. The books with subject headings that contained most of the common elements found in the street lit definitions, in combination with the books' summaries, were used in the research. The subject headings are in Appendix A.

This process resulted in ten paperback books:

1. Bad Girlz: A Novel by Shannon Holmes

Summary: "Taken under the wing of Kat, a veteran stripper, Tender and Goldie must turn to the streets and strip clubs as a way to survive difficult times."

(WorldCat,

<http://firstsearch.oclc.org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/WebZ/FSPage?pagename=reviews:sessionid=fsapp6-57908-els73lsk-8f0wcd:entitypagenum=39:0>, Retrieved April 8, 2006).

2. The Coldest Winter Ever: A Novel by Sister Souljah

Summary: "The daughter of a Brooklyn drug lord, cocky Winter Santiago must use all her power and charm to protect her position when war breaks out between rival gangs. Reprint." (WorldCat,

<http://firstsearch.oclc.org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/WebZ/FSPage?pagename=reviews:sessionid=fsapp6-57908-els73lsk-8f0wcd:entitypagenum=13:0>, Retrieved April 8, 2006).

3. Dollar Bill: A Novel by Joy(lynn Jossel)

Summary: "From the killing grounds of Gary, Indiana, Dollar goes from a small pup just living and learning to a big dawg [*sic*] learning to live. Dollar decides against joining the typical ballers out on the streets hustling drugs to make a come up. After carefully critiquing the game, Dollar chooses a more concrete type of hustle, straight out robbin' [*sic*] folks. Dollar catches a case at the ripe age of 18 on the first of many planned hustles that he thought would lead him to the good life. The case resulted in Dollar being sentenced to live out the rest of his natural life behind bars. When Dollar encounters Romeo, the hardest cat in prison, he realizes that prison life exists six feet under hell. Romeo takes Dollar's mind on a manipulating roller coaster ride, which almost pushes him to the brink of insanity. In the beginning Romeo instills the fear of death in Dollar, but in the end he gives him life. When the state sentenced Dollar they never expected the affect it would have on the new life he would eventually lead. They never imagined that he would some day walk the streets again and perfect his game. Back on the streets, Dollar manages to drag everyone in his life who means anything to him into his deadly game. His bid in prison taught him one important thing that he would now apply to his hustle, how not to get caught!" (WorldCat,

<http://firstsearch.oclc.org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/WebZ/FSPage?pagename=reviews:sessionid=fsapp6-57908-els73lsk-8f0wcd:entitypagenum=18:0>, Retrieved April 8, 2006).

4. Dutch by Teri Woods

Summary: “The First of a Trilogy tells the story of Bernard James a.k.a. Dutch the most dangerous and feared gangster to come up in Jersey in the last thirty years. From his experience and skill as a young car thief, Dutch recognized the opportunity to ruthlessly become the ruler of the streets and grabbed it. After serving 18 months in prison for a botched auto theft, Dutch promised himself, he’d never return to prison. Once out, he never looked back.” (Teri Woods Publishing, <http://www.teriwoodspublishing.com/bookstore.htm>, Retrieved April 8, 2006).

5. Entangled by K. Elliot

Summary: “After five years in prison, drug dealer Jamal Stewart is becoming reacquainted with the perils of the streets. His rehabilitation, if any, can only be seen through the eyes of his new love Dream Nelson, a middle school teacher.

With a criminal record, finding employment becomes a job in itself for Jamal. His best friend Dawg pushes him to contact an old cocaine connection. Dream attempts to keep him from the life of crime that eventually reels her in as well.

Living in a world filled with unprotected sex, violence, payoffs, disloyalty and drug dealing, Jamal becomes the focus of a manhunt. Vowing to never return to prison, he decides he will hold court in the streets. He soon learns how some things can be caught...without a chase.

This multi-plotted suspense novel will bring reality far too close to home.” (K-Elliott Home Page, <http://www.k-elliott.com/>, Retrieved April 8, 2006).

6. A Hustler’s Wife by Nikki Turner

Summary: “Sweet innocent Yarni, from a well-to do [*sic*] family, by chance, meets Richomd’s [*sic*] notorious drug kingpin, Des. Immediately they develop an astronomical love, which separates [*sic*] her from her family and friends. But when Des, is sentenced to life in prison, she will learn, being a hustler’s wife isn’t as easy, with her sole provider behind bars. Travel with Yarni, as she survives when the script is flipped. At times she plays the game, and at other times...the game plays her. Her journey is filled with laughter, tears, failures, triumphs and perseverance.” (bookstore.jpg, <http://www.nikkturner.com/book.htm>, April 8, 2006).

7. Imagine This by Vickie Stringer

Summary: “Pamela is serving time on federal drug charges, and is torn between honoring the code of the streets or betraying her friends in order to return home to raise her son.” (WorldCat, <http://firstsearch.oclc.org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/WebZ/FSPage?pagename=reviews:sessionid=fsapp6-57908-els73lsk8f0wcd:entitypagenum=45:0>, April 8, 2006).

8. Little Ghetto Girl: A Harlem Story by Danielle Santiago

Summary: “Kisa and Sincere are trying to create a stable life for their new daughter, but greed, jealousy, and betrayal threaten to tear the young family apart.” (Street Literature, <http://www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/booklists/streetlit.html>, April 8, 2006).

9. A Project Chick by Nikki Turner

Summary: “Tressa is a fly girl accustomed to the lavish lifestyle that her possessive, deranged, baby's daddy, Lucky, has provided her with. In order to keep her high post standards of living, she has excused so many of his unforgivable actions. It is not until he pulls off the ultimate stunt that she realizes that no mink coat, car, house, or any amount of money is worth her peace of mind. Never blinking or thinking twice, Tressa leaves everything behind, with the exception of her street savvy, and sets out to make a life of her own, one that would be filled with hard times and even harder luck. Tressa soon finds herself making the transition from public figure to public assistance. Every day of her life seems like one drama-filled chapter after another. From the baby daddy drama, to the backstabbing friends, to the various unforgettable men she sorts through and disposes of. There will be times she has to struggle and scamble [*sic*] just to make ends meet, and other times when she will stand tall and hold her own. In this captivating tale, Tressa's voyage will expose readers to a side of a struggling single mother that has yet to be revealed.” (bookstore.jpg, <http://www.nikkiturner.com/book.htm>, April 8, 2006).

10. Thugs and the Women Who Love Them by Wahida Clark

Summary: “Written by a Federal prison inmate, this novel follows several young women who are trying to escape from poverty. It's a difficult journey because they fall for men who are involved in drugs and crime. Angel, for example, is working her way through law school—by writing bad checks and fencing merchandise, unfortunately—and dating a violent pimp called Snake. Meanwhile, her friend Kyra is torn between two drug dealers. Graphic sex and plenty of drama make this novel a likely crowd pleaser. The sequel is Every Thug Needs a Lady, and a third book is said to be forthcoming.” (Doyle, 2005, p. 192).

The final step was to check if the titles existed in the online public access catalogs (OPACs) of the Durham, Orange and Wake Counties' libraries which comprise the Triangle-area of North Carolina. The Durham County Library System is county-wide and has a main library with seven branches. The Orange County libraries are not a cohesive unit. The Orange County Public Library and its three branch locations: the Carrboro Public Library, the Carrboro Cybrary and the Cedar Grove Branch library are members of the Hyconeechee Regional Library System (<http://www.co.orange.nc.us/library/Hyconeechee.htm>). This system includes the four previously mentioned public libraries, and the libraries in Person and Caswell Counties for a total of six libraries. The Chapel Hill Public Library is a municipal library located in Orange County that is not

part of the Hyconeechee Regional Library System (Johnston, 2004). The Wake County Library System is county-wide and has 17 branches and a bookmobile. The street addresses of the public libraries are listed in Appendix B. The libraries were chosen for the research because of the researcher's proximity to them in case it became necessary to visit them.

In the search process for the books, the titles were searched for first. The authors' names were searched for next if the title searches did not recover any results. Finally, the books' ISBNs were searched for if the authors' searches were unsuccessful. The libraries' online public access catalogs are available via their homepages. The web addresses of these libraries are listed in Appendix B for further review.

## **Results**

According to the OPACs, the Orange County Public Library owns The Coldest Winter Ever: A Novel which is in lost status, and A Project Chick. The Carrboro Cybrary did not own any of the ten street lit books. The Carrboro Branch Library owns The Coldest Winter Ever: A Novel, but none of the other books. The Cedar Grove Public Library owns a copy of The Coldest Winter Ever: A Novel. Dutch is owned by Person County Public Library within the Hyconeechee Regional Library System so the patrons who have an Orange County library card have the right to check out books from other system libraries. Chapel Hill Public Library owns four copies of The Coldest Winter Ever: A Novel and one copy of Bad Girlz: A Novel.

The Durham County Public Library system owns four of the ten books from the list between the eight public libraries: A Hustler's Wife, The Coldest Winter: A Novel, A Project Chick and Dutch. The Wake County Public Library system owns six of the ten books from the list: A Hustler's Wife, The Coldest Winter Ever: A Novel, A Project Chick, Dutch, Bad Girlz: A Novel and Imagine This: A Novel. Wake County Library system provides the greatest number of titles for their patrons, and the Carrboro Cybrary provides the least. The public libraries that own street lit books provide those from the most popular authors. Four of the books from the Essence bestseller lists were not found in any of the libraries: Dollar Bill: A Novel, Entangled, Little Ghetto Girl: A Harlem

Story and Thugs and the Woman Who Love Them. These books are self-published or published by small presses.

Based on the findings, it is the opinion of this author that the writers who self-publish or are published by small presses are not owned by the public libraries because they generally would not be distributed by large publishers. Therefore, the books are not available to the companies that distribute to public libraries. The librarians would not be aware that certain street lit novels are available unless they searched for them. The source of the problem lies with the authors and the publishers. The authors cannot afford to pay for distribution services from the publishers, which severely limits the dissemination of their books.

In addition, self-published books and books by small presses usually are not reviewed in the popular publications that librarians use in their collection development (O'Briant, Oct. 2004). This situation negatively impacts the exposure that these street lit books receive. In turn, the librarians are not purchasing books that their patrons may be interested in. Therefore, they are not fulfilling the first policy of the ALA's Library Bill of Rights in their unawareness. Patrons may be the means of notifying librarians of this "new" genre. When the patrons request street lit books, the librarians are informed of their existence. Then, it would be left up to the librarians to locate the books.

The accessibility of the books to publishers determine how widely disseminated they are. Authors not affiliated with large publishers through publishing and/or distributing do not receive the promotion that authors with book publishing deals receive.

## **Conclusion**

Authors who do not have the monetary support of large publishing houses are not as well-known as authors that have contracts with big publishers. It is challenging for new authors especially those who have criminal records (as is the case with many street lit writers) to obtain deals with publishers. Having a contract with a publisher affects the control and ownership that an author has over his or her work. These aspects may affect whether the street lit authors pursue contracts with big publishers. The Internet allows lesser-known authors to make their books available to the public. All of the books from the research are available to purchase online, usually through the personal web sites of the authors or sites managed by the small press. The Internet offers the opportunities to street lit authors to disseminate their works; however, they still lack the large-scale promotion.

Once they are aware of titles of interest to the patrons, librarians have the responsibility to fulfill or deny the requests of their patrons. They can request the books from their publishers who are then accountable to the librarians for providing them. If publishers are unable to locate the street lit books, the librarians are in difficult situations. They could choose to bypass their distributors, and buy the books online. Going this route may violate the libraries' policies or the libraries' contracts with their distributors. This situation results in an ethical dilemma for librarians who must decide between honoring patron requests or following their employers' policies. It is important that librarians

discuss the difficulties with finding street lit titles with their supervisors so that they are aware.

Lack of accessibility is not the only reason that librarians may not buy street lit books. The controversial content of street lit books may affect librarians' decisions to purchase them. Further studies could be done to determine their attitudes toward this genre and how it affects their purchasing decisions. Another area of potential research is an in-depth study of the demographics of service areas of public libraries which do or do not carry street lit books. Since the main readers of street lit are African American and within a certain age range, areas with few people who meet these criteria may not be interested in reading books of this genre. Another potential area for further study is whether readers of street lit move on to more challenging reading.

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**Appendix A: List of subject headings found in WorldCat**

1. Holmes, S. (2003). *Bad girlz: A novel*. New York: Atria Books.  
(ISBN 074348620X)  
Young women -- Fiction.  
Stripteasers -- Fiction.  
Female friendship -- Fiction.  
African American women -- Fiction.  
Philadelphia (Pa.) -- Fiction.
  
2. Souljah, S. (1999). *The coldest Winter ever: A Novel*. New York: Pocket Books.  
(ISBN 0671025368)  
African American women -- New York (State) -- New York -- Fiction.  
Inner cities -- New York (State) -- New York -- Fiction.  
Brooklyn (New York, N.Y.) -- Fiction.
  
3. Joy. (2003). *Dollar bill: A novel*. Columbus, OH: Triple Crown Publications.  
(ISBN 097024729X)  
African Americans -- Fiction.  
Swindlers and swindling -- Fiction.  
Ex-convicts -- Fiction.  
Gary (Ind.) -- Fiction.
  
4. Woods, T. (2003). *Dutch*. New York: Teri Woods Pub.  
(ISBN 0967224942)  
Gangsters -- New Jersey -- Newark -- Fiction.  
Newark (N.J.) -- Fiction.
  
5. Elliot, K. (2003). *Entangled*. Charlotte, NC: Urban Lifestyle Press.  
(ISBN 0971769702)  
Narcotics dealers -- Fiction.  
Ex-convicts -- Fiction.  
Middle school teachers -- Fiction.  
Suspense fiction.
  
6. Turner, N. (2003). *A hustler's wife*. Columbus, OH: Triple Crown Publications.  
(ISBN 0970247257)  
Drugs -- Virginia -- Richmond -- Fiction.  
Drug dealers -- Virginia -- Richmond -- Fiction.  
Prisoners' spouses -- Virginia -- Richmond -- Fiction.  
Richmond (Va.) -- Fiction.

7. Stringer, V. (2004). *Imagine this: A novel*. New York: Atria Books.  
(ISBN 0743493478)  
African American single mothers -- Fiction.  
Ohio -- Fiction.
8. Santiago, D. (2004). *Little ghetto girl: A Harlem story*. Charlotte, NC: Two of a Kind  
in association with Mischievous Girl Ink.  
(ISBN 0975258907)  
Criminals -- Fiction.  
Female offenders -- Fiction.  
Narcotics dealers -- Fiction.  
Drug traffic -- Fiction.
9. Turner, N. (2003). *A project chick*. Columbus, OH: Triple Crown Publications.  
(ISBN 0970247265)  
African American women -- Fiction.  
Single mothers -- Fiction.  
Poor single mothers -- Fiction.  
African American single mothers -- Fiction.  
Inner cities -- Fiction.
10. Clark, W. (2002). *Thugs and the women who love them*. Brooklyn, NY: Black Print  
Pub.  
(ISBN 0972277110)  
African Americans -- Fiction.  
Drugs -- Fiction.

**Appendix B: Street addresses of public libraries by County****Durham County**

<http://www.durhamcountylibrary.org>

1. Bragtown Branch  
3200 Dearborn Drive  
Durham, NC 27704

2. McDougald Terrace Branch  
1101 Lawson Street  
Durham, NC 27701

3. North Durham Branch  
5120 N. Roxboro Road (Riverview Shopping Center)  
Durham, NC 27704

4. Parkwood Branch  
5122 Revere Road  
Durham, NC 27713

5. Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club Branch  
810 North Alston Avenue  
Durham, NC 27701

6. Southwest Branch  
3605 Shannon Road  
Durham, NC 27707

7. Stanford L. Warren  
1201 Fayetteville Street  
Durham, NC 27707

8. Main Library  
300 North Roxboro Street  
Durham, NC 27701

**Orange County**

1. Chapel Hill Public Library  
100 Library Drive  
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

<http://24.199.159.208/>

Hyconeechee Regional Library System:

2. Orange County Public Library

300 W. Tryon St.

Hillsborough, NC 27278

<http://www.co.orange.nc.us/library/>

3. Carrboro Branch Library

900 Old Fayetteville Rd.

Chapel Hill, NC 27514

(Located inside of McDougale Middle School)

<http://www.co.orange.nc.us/library/carrboro/index.htm>

4. Carrboro Cybrary

100N Greensboro Street

Carrboro, NC 27510

<http://www.co.orange.nc.us/library/cybrary>

5. Cedar Grove Branch Library

5800 NC Hwy 86N

Hillsborough, NC 27278

<http://www.co.orange.nc.us/library/cedargrove/>

### **Wake County**

<http://www.wakegov.com/libraries/default.htm>

1. Athens Drive Community Library

1420 Athens Drive

Raleigh, NC 27606

2. Bookmobile

Raleigh, NC

3. Cameron Village Library

1930 Clark Ave

Raleigh, NC 27605

4. Cary Public Library

310 South Academy Street

Cary, NC 27511

5. East Regional Library

946 Steeple Square Court

Knightdale, NC 27545

6. Electronic Information Center  
334 Fayetteville Street Mall  
Raleigh, NC 27601

7. Eva H. Perry Library  
2100 Shepherd's Vineyard Dr.  
Apex, NC 27502

8. Fuquay-Varina Library  
133 South Fuquay Avenue  
Fuquay-Varina, NC 27526

9. Green Road Library  
4101 Green Road  
Raleigh, NC 27604

10. North Regional Library  
200 Horizon Drive  
Raleigh, NC 27615

11. Olivia Raney History Library  
4016 Carya Drive  
Raleigh, NC 27610

12. Richard B. Harrison Library  
1313 New Bern Avenue  
Raleigh, NC 27610

13. South Raleigh Branch Library  
1601-14 Crosslink Road  
Raleigh, NC 27610

14. Southeast Regional Library  
908 Seventh Avenue  
Garner, NC 27529

15. Wake Forest Branch Library  
400 E. Holding Avenue  
Wake Forest, NC 27587

16. Wendell Branch Library  
207 South Hollybrook Road  
Wendell, NC 27591

17. West Popular Lending Library  
5800 Duraleigh Road

Raleigh, NC 27612

18. Zebulon Branch Library  
1000 Dogwood Drive  
Zebulon, NC 27597