Queer Strategies in an Era of LGBT Information Abundance

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Abstract

This poster introduces lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) grassroots information organizations and outlines a plan for an ethnographic research project to study these organizations' current contexts. Drawing upon queer theory, information grounds, library as place and the new librarianship, this project investigates the following questions: Why and how do members utilize and develop LGBT grassroots information organizations in this era of ever- proliferating LGBT information? What are the challenges and opportunities for LGBT grassroots information organizations as they navigate different organizational models such as autonomy and institutional partnership? Do, and if so, how do queer information activities continue to take place within LGBT grassroots information organizations?

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1   Introduction

Within lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities in Canada and the United States there is a legacy towards collecting and disseminating information otherwise ignored or destroyed by society-at-large. These LGBT grassroots information organizations operate outside of the conventional professionally dominated library and archival realm, which creates "queer" informational organizational contexts. Examples of LGBT grassroots information organizations' queer strategies include: locating their organizations in private homes and home-like environments, collecting ephemeral materials, and an interest in "everyday" people and their experiences as opposed to famous figures (Cvetkovich, 2003; Halberstam, 2005; Cooper, Forthcoming; Cooper and Przybylo, Forthcoming). In contrast to the earlier era of LGBT invisibility and information scarcity that LGBT information organizations emerged from, LGBT information, social and networking opportunities are now seemingly plentiful and easily available online. The popularity of LGBT and queer studies within the academy and growing visibility of LGBT issues more broadly, furthermore, has led to new partnerships between LGBT grassroots information organizations and other public and private institutions such as academic libraries and archives, banks and corporations and the emergence of LGBT information organizations in exclusively academic contexts and increased LGBT programming and resources within public libraries.

Studies on the information-seeking habits of LGBT-identified people demonstrate that the LGBT community has information needs that are not met by mainstream libraries and archives and that the LGBT community continues to feel distrust and discomfort within mainstream library and archival spaces (Creelman & Harris, 1989; Whitt, 1993; Joyce and Shrader, 1997; Taylor, 2000; Hamer, 2003; Rothbauer, 2004a; 2004b; Rothbauer, 2007). While professionally oriented library literature addresses LGBT issues in terms of programming and resource recommendations for LGBT identified patrons in public and academic library settings (Martin & Murdock, 2007; Mehra & Braquet, 2007; Greenblatt, 2010), the unique contexts for serving LGBT information needs within grassroots organizational settings need to be explored in further depth. A rigorous, ethnographically informed qualitative investigation of LGBT grassroots information

organizations is needed to explore their evolving contexts and the motivating factors behind their continued creation and use.

2 LGBT Grassroots Information Organizations' Evolving Contexts

LGBT grassroots information organizations in Canada and the United States first emerged in conjunction with the lesbian and gay movement post World War Two. For example, The ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives (ONE) in Los Angeles, California began as the private collection of activist Jim Kepner, who was highly involved in homophile organizing through Los Angeles' Mattachine Society, and helped found ONE Magazine and the ONE Educational Institute in the early 1950s. Similarly, the Canadian Lesbian Gay Archives (CLGA) in Toronto, Canada was founded in 1973 under the auspices *The Body Politic*, a gay liberation newspaper. The Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn, New York is also noteworthy for being formed through lesbian feminist organizing and continues to operate under a lesbian feminist mandate.

Reflecting trends in LGBT activism and increasing LGBT visibility generally, LGBT information organizations now exist in a variety of private and public configurations and are not necessarily connected to activist activity. Pre-existing, previously autonomous LGBT information organizations are increasingly partnering with other institutions: ONE is part of the University of Southern California Libraries and the June Mazer Lesbian Archives, also in Los Angeles, has a project to make materials more publically accessible with the University of California Los Angeles library and the Centre for the Study of Women. LGBT information organizations are also now being created in academic contexts, such as the Transgender Archives at the University of Victoria in British Columbia. Other LGBT archives such as the CLGA, however, remain entirely autonomous and new autonomous LGBT grassroots information organizations, such as Out on the Shelf in Guelph, Ontario also continue to be formed.

3 Investigating LGBT Grassroots Information Organizations Ethnographically

Drawing upon queer theory, information grounds, library as place and the new librarianship, this project investigates the following questions: Why and how do LGBT community members utilize and continue to develop LGBT grassroots information organizations in this era of ever-proliferating LGBT information? What are the challenges and opportunities for LGBT grassroots information organizations as they navigate different organizational models such as autonomy and institutional partnership? Do, and if so, how do queer information activities continue to take place within LGBT grassroots information organizations?

In order to develop a rich descriptive account of the unique activities within particular LGBT grassroots information organizations while also developing an analysis that cuts across organizations, research for this project will be conducted at two LGBT grassroots information organizations utilizing a comparative ethnographic approach. There is a growing movement toward conducting ethnographic research within information organizational settings (Foster & Gibbons, 2007; Flinn, Stevens & Shepherd, 2009; Asher, Duke & Green, 2010; Khoo, Rozaklis).

4 Abbreviated Literature Review

Queer theory is a multi-disciplinary critical framework that examines social and cultural activities through an outsider or "queer" perspective. As Turner (2004), explains, the term "queer" does not relate to a specific identity category, but rather, the failure of fitting into an established set of societal expectations. While queer theory research highlights the unique activities that take place in LGBT grassroots information organizations (Cvetkovich, 2003; Halberstam, 2005), these works fail to take information-based activities explicitly into account. This project, in contrast, aims to place queer theory in dialogue with information grounds, library as place and the new librarianship.

Information grounds captures the informal, socially driven information-based activities take place in LGBT grassroots information organizations in addition to more formal information activities. Fischer, Landry & Naumer (2006) identify a number of factors that contribute to information ground creation including: conviviality, creature comforts, and location. These factors may help explain why LGBT grassroots information organizations continue to popular in an era where LGBT information is widely available online and in public library settings.

Library as place as per Buschman and Leckie (2007) allows us to view libraries as "physical entities where a complex mix of activities, processes and actions occur on a daily basis." (p. 3). Focusing on the "library as place," therefore, invites reflection on the location-specific, physical and material qualities to experiences within LGBT grassroots information organizational environments.

The new librarianship as per R. David Lankes (2011) advocates for a framework that transitions away from collections-driven approaches to community-driven approaches including new partnerships between academic and public libraries, community members and community organizations. LGBT grassroots information organizations provide a case for exploring the potentialities of new librarianship because they are community-driven information organizations and because they are increasingly collaborating with public and academic libraries and archives.

5   Conclusion

This poster will introduce LGBT grassroots information and provide: 1) an overview of the study design 2) highlights from the study's literature review and 3) updates on progress of the study. This study will be an important step towards understanding the evolving context of LGBT grassroots information organizations as a facet of LGBT information activity more broadly. As a result, the study places LGBT and queer studies in dialogue with research pertaining to community-based information activities including information grounds, library as place and the new librarianship.

6   References

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