

**QUEER LIBRARY ALLIANCE:
GLOBAL REFLECTIONS
AND IMAGININGS**

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Editors**

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-- *Rae-Anne Montague and Lucas McKeever*

INTRODUCTION

Rae-Anne Montague and Lucas McKeever

The relationship between story and survival is really important for queer and trans people. - Michael Erickson, Glad Day Bookshop¹

Queer identities are complex. They are embedded in a web of intersectionality and are often challenging to fully define.² Sometimes queerness shines like a beacon and this radiance is captured in media. Sometimes it is more subtle. Often it is invisible.

Promoting understanding and visibility are primary goals of this anthology. The text draws inspiration from many sources, including the IFLA LGBTQ Users SIG, the Queer Library Alliance, and our ongoing interest in probing queer representation.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) describes itself as “the leading international body representing the interests of library and information services and their users... - the global voice of the library and information profession.”³ In 2013, a small group of conference attendees came together at the annual meeting in Singapore.⁴ They noted that, aside from social gatherings of LGBTQ-identified professionals at the conference, no structured or sustained discussions of issues related to library services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning (LGBTQ) community members had taken place within IFLA during its eighty-year history. With a burst

of collective energy, the LGBTQ Users Special Interest Group (SIG) emerged. The SIG serves as a platform to promote visibility and dialogue around queer issues of importance to librarians globally. In its first three years, the SIG has provided a space for fifteen presentations to be given to audiences made up of information professionals from around the world. The idea to develop this anthology emerged at the first meeting of the SIG in August 2014 in Lyon, France as a way to make these conversations accessible to a broader audience.⁵

Our international lens draws upon our individual and collective experiences. The first part of our title, Queer Library Alliance (QLA), is the namesake of a student group that emerged at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS).⁶ Students from this program have been involved for many years in attending, organizing for, volunteering with, and presenting at the Midwest Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, and Ally College Conference (MBGLTACC), a regional, student-led gathering that began in Iowa in 1993.⁷ In February 2008, UIUC hosted MGBLTACC. Having the conference on the campus afforded new opportunities for student involvement and the participation of GSLIS students subsequently increased. QLA officially emerged from that time. MGBLTACC participation included the planning and facilitation of group presentations and the hosting of exhibits designed to explore queer-library and information science intersections, such as information access, cataloging and classification, collection development, special collections, and children and youth services. Some of this work complemented efforts of members of the Progressive Librarians Guild student group.⁸ Collaborative conference involvement spawned new energy to promote queer advocacy, explore professional and academic issues, and develop varied social activities. These included a book club, participation in campus and local queer events, and work with national organizations such as the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table of the American Library Association (GLBTRT) and the Society of American Archivists Lesbian and Gay Archives Roundtable (LAGAR), as well as

field trips to LGBTQ libraries and archives. Both of the editors of this volume were involved in QLA at GSLIS.⁹

The latter half of our title stems from the esteemed scholarship in Judith Butler's seminal text, *Bodies that Matter*. Butler eloquently invites us to consider where we have been and where we might go. In the context of connecting LGBTQ issues with library and information science (LIS), this plethora of possibilities is critical at this time in our history.

If the term "queer" is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which it is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes.¹⁰

Intersectional Realities

It's a queer world. Imagine. In LIS terms, this means that there has been queer content since there has been content. Even so, it is clear that much of our story has not been recorded or recognized. In fact, we have been and still are frequently disregarded and misrepresented. Might this be due to inadequacies in language, or taxonomy, or human creativity, or some combination? Queer complexities are unintelligible within simple systems.¹¹ Does this lead to confusion and fear? As library professionals who create, utilize, and make accessible systems for organization and classification of information, intersectionality must remain a clear objective in addressing these historical absences. While discussing the tension that exists between choosing what materials are acceptable or unacceptable to archive, Tim Dean explains that "Just as archives include certain things by excluding others, so they also routinely exclude particular classes of witness to what they include."¹² For information professionals, this points to the inevitability that the very processes we engage with every day will remain exclusionary in one way or another. Rather than becoming discouraged, acknowledging this shortcoming can remind us that achieving equity in library services is an ongoing process rather than a project with an end date.

In 2015, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, issued a report on "Discrimination and violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity." The report concludes that:

The overall picture remains one of continuing, pervasive, violent abuse, harassment and discrimination affecting LGBT and intersex persons in all regions. These constitute serious human rights violations, often perpetrated with impunity, indicating that current arrangements to protect the human rights of LGBT and intersex persons are inadequate.¹³

As of May 2015, there were 118 countries where same sex sexual acts between adults in private are legal, seventy-five countries where same-sex sexual acts are still illegal, and sixty-two countries where discrimination in employment based on sexual orientation was prohibited.¹⁴ In June 2016, the UN Human Rights Council voted to appoint an independent expert to monitor and report on levels of violence and discrimination against LGBT people.¹⁵ In tandem with this official recognition, many activists are bringing issues to light and making efforts to end discrimination around the globe.¹⁶

We advocate for queer rights and representation grounded in social justice and intersectionality.

With an intersectional lens, activists, human rights defenders, policy makers, and stakeholders can also uncover how political, economic and social structures such as patriarchy, capitalism and neo-liberalism generate and perpetuate social inequality in all spaces of societies. It can show how the State's institutions produce and replicate systems of oppression based on gender, sexuality, class, race, religion, ability, amongst others, all of which play in simultaneous ways and affect particularly the most marginalised individuals and groups.¹⁷

How are librarians, archivists and other LIS professionals contributing to socially just and intersectionally-grounded policies and practices? This is the root of what we seek to better understand via the IFLA LGBTQ Users SIG and through contributions to this anthology. We were very pleased to receive many responses to the call for contributions based on topics of contemporary importance to librarians serving LGBTQ

users around the world. We ultimately selected eight areas to develop as chapters. These topics represent some of our efforts to respond to challenges, address critical needs, and serve as essential forces against systematic oppression across service areas, library types, and borders.

Part 1: Reflections - Developing Library Services to Meet LGBTQ Users' Needs

Culturally sensitive catalogue headings are not a quirky, unnecessary luxury but proof of our commitment to the truth and accuracy.
- Sanford Berman¹⁸

The first section of this collection of essays looks at how we are developing understanding and library services that reflect and are responsive to LGBTQ user needs.

Noriko Asato and Andrew Wertheimer start off with an exploration of the highly influential Michael McConnell case. The case of McConnell, whose offer to work as a librarian at the University of Minnesota in 1970 was rescinded after he openly revealed his homosexual identity, reverberated throughout the profession and prompted changes within libraries, the ALA, and beyond. This early and essential disruption eventually led to an happy ending when the Jean-Nickolaus Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies received the Baker-McConnell papers over forty years later.

Elizabeth Chapman's contribution considers the state of LGBTQ public library services to children in the United Kingdom. She examines current policy and reveals several "patchy" areas, including lack of awareness and knowledge. The need for more training is also discussed.

In the third chapter, Louis Kamwina Nsapo offers an analysis of difficulties faced while archiving personal materials in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Public rhetoric surrounding homosexuality and the lingering effects of imperialism present activists with unique challenges in their efforts to preserve the cultural memory of DRC's LGBTQ community.

In chapter four, Gregory Toth reviews biases inherent in the Library of Congress, Dewey Decimal, and Universal Decimal Classification systems with an emphasis on retrieval problems for LGBTQ topics. He urges all librarians to advocate for changes to improve cataloging practices.

Part 2: Imaginings - Queering Professional Practice

The second part of this collection emphasizes opportunities and approaches for augmenting queer professional practice, which ultimately benefits our all library users.

Bharat Mehra and Lisette Hernandez's chapter offers content analysis of news items from *The Times of India* and proposes library alliances at economic, educational, legal, political, and social levels to promote lawful protection of sexual minorities in India. Librarian voices are an essential force in progressive change.

In the sixth chapter, Ragnhild Brandstedt describes the process of awareness-making at Mariestad Public Library in Sweden through collaboration between the public library and LGBTQ advocates. This action-based research, conducted in 2012-2013, has led to education for the entire library staff, certification, and numerous improvements in service.

Matthew Knight's contribution describes the process of developing a queer academic collection at the University of South Florida featuring monographs, archives, oral histories, and research materials. Key issues include access, community engagement, and resource allocation.

In the final chapter, Rachel Wexelbaum reviews concerns over inequitable access and calls on librarians to review spaces and services available to vulnerable users. She offers suggestions for using social media to increase safe spaces and reliable information services for LGBTQ users, in collaboration with community members.

Context and Limits

Most of the contributors to this anthology have been involved with the IFLA LGBTQ Users SIG. We hail from, reside in, and study issues from several countries around the world including Canada, Democratic Republic of Congo, England, India, Japan, Sweden, and the United States. We are a queer collective. That said, we also recognize that there are biases inherent in our perspectives. For example, during the development of this anthology, both editors lived in the United States. For the editors and others guided by western perspectives, our conceptions of queer worlds are limited. Our understanding and by extension our writing, is biased by our particular experiences and perspectives.

As referenced above, the ALA GLBTRT was founded in 1970 as the ALA's Task Force on Gay Liberation, the first national gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender professional organization. The GLBTRT strives to serve the information needs of the GLBT professional library community, and the GLBT information and access needs of individuals at large. It supports the free and necessary access to information, as reflected by the missions of the ALA and democratic institutions.¹⁹ Organized professionals concerned with our stories occupy themselves around the world to enable varied access to queer history and culture.²⁰ Some operate boldly. Others persist quietly.

The initial period of the development of this book took place in 2015, forty-five years after the founding of the first GLBT professional library organization. This was a gleeful time for many individuals and families in the United States, because on June 26, during the ALA Annual Meeting in San Francisco, the Supreme Court of the United States recognized the fundamental right of same-sex couples to marry.²¹ While not all LGBTQ people advocate for marriage, many viewed this event with joy and celebrations abounded during the ALA gathering.

Sadly, as we approached publication in 2016, another queer-focused event took place in the United States. On June 12, there was a mass

shooting inside a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida that left fifty people dead. This mind-numbing event occurred in the middle of PRIDE month, in the city where ALA would soon be gathering for our annual meeting. It was a stark reminder of our marginality and the need for increased understanding and justice. As thoughtful leaders like Avram Dinkelstein and Angela Davis have stated, “freedom is a constant struggle.”²² As librarians, archivists, and other information professionals committed to facilitating access and high-quality services for LGBTQ- and other marginalized users, there is much more to consider and do.

Endnotes

1. Erickson is co-owner of the Glad Day Bookshop. Established in 1970 in Toronto, Glad Day is the oldest LGBTQ bookshop in the world. <http://www.gladdaybookshop.com/pages/history>.

2. See for example, see: Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987); Niko Besnier and Kalissa Alexeyeff, eds., *Gender on the Edge: Transgender, Gay, and Other Pacific Islanders* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014); Sokari Ekine and Ahkima Abbas, eds., *Queer African Reader* (Nairobi: Pambazuka Press, 2013); Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, *Living Out Islam: Voices of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims* (New York: NYU Press, 2013); Audrey Yue and Jun Zubillaga-Pow, eds., *Queer Singapore: Illiberal Citizenship and Mediated Cultures* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012).

3. About IFLA, <http://www.ifla.org/about>. Accessed November 12, 2016.

4. Male homosexual activity is illegal in Singapore. <http://www.equaldex.com/region/singapore>.

5. Rae-Anne Montague, “Leading and Transforming Library Services,” paper presented at IFLA WLIC, 2015. <http://library.ifla.org/1288/1/128-montague-en.pdf>.

6. In 2016, the GSLIS became the School of Information Sciences.

7. The Midwest Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Ally College Conference (MBLGTACC). http://lgbt.wikia.com/wiki/Midwest_Bisexual_Lesbian_Gay_Transgender_Ally_College_Conference.

8. The Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG) was founded in New York City in 1990. PLG does not accept the notion of librarianship as a neutral profession and asserts that “cataloging, indexing, acquisitions policy and collection development, the character of reference services, library automation, library management, and virtually every other library issue embody political value choices.” <http://www.progressivelibrariansguild.org/content/purpose.shtml>

9. QLA: Queer Library Alliance. <https://ischool.illinois.edu/events/2013/02/18/qla-queer-library-alliance>.

10. Judith Butler . *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Psychology Press, 1993), 228.

11. “It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon-holes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects.” Alfred. C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Co. 1948).

12. Tim Dean, “Introduction: Pornography, Technology, Archive,” in *Porn Archives*, ed. Tim Dean, Steven Ruszczycky, and David Squires (Durham,NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 4.

13. United Nations, Human Rights Council, “Discrimination and Violence against Individuals Based on their Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity,” (May 4, 2015), 20, http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session29/Documents/A_HRC_29_23_en.doc.

14. Aengus Carroll and Lucas Paoli Itaborahy, *State Sponsored Homophobia 2015: A World Survey of Laws: Criminalisation, Protection and Recognition of Same-Sex Love* (Geneva; ILGA, 2015), 25-28, 33-36. http://old.ilga.org/Statehomophobia/ILGA_State_Sponsored_Homophobia_2015.pdf.

15. UN News Centre, "UN agrees to appoint human rights expert on protection of LGBT," July 1, 2016, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=54385#.V4PxBZMrLaY>.

16. For example, the website "Where Love is Illegal" documents and shares stories of discrimination from around the world: <http://where-love-is-illegal.com>. Another intriguing national example is Ladlad, a Filipino LGBT political party: <http://ladladpartylist.blogspot.com>.

17. Fernando D'Elío with Neha Sood, "Intersections," in Carroll and Itaborahy, *State Sponsored Homophobia*, 2015, 21.

18. Listen to Sanford Berman discuss his ideas in more detail in an interview available through the A. Arro Smith "Capturing our Stories" Oral Histories Program RS 97/1/70. <http://archives.library.illinois.edu/alaarchon/index.php?p=collections/controlcard&id=8511>.

19. Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table of the American Library Association (GLBTRT). <http://www.ala.org/glbtrt>.

20. In fall 2016, there were forty-three LGBTQ libraries, archives, and special collections included in the Wikipedia listing. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libraries_and_the_LGBTQ_community.

21. Obergefell et al. v. Hodges, Director, Ohio Department of Health, et al., Supreme Court of the United States Syllabus No. 14–556, http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/14pdf/14-556_3204.pdf.

22. Avram Dinkelstein co-founded the "Silence=Death" Project in 1986. He reflects on the process here: <http://www.silenceopens-doors.com/2010/04/04/silencedeath-2>. Angela Y. Davis is a political activist, scholar, author, and speaker. Her most recent book is *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

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