

Silence May Equal Death, But So Does Uncompensated Queer Labor: How Not to Publish an LGBTQ+ Journal During a Pandemic

Rachel Wexelbaum, Guest Editor

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Editorial

The title of the special issue of *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion* is “Queering Information: LGBTQ+ Memory, Interpretation, Dissemination”. I was invited to serve as a guest editor of this journal when I was an academic librarian and tenured university faculty, and I saw it as a great honor to do so. I reached out to all of the international LGBTQ+ contacts I had made during my conference travels, committee engagement, Wikipedia endeavors, and other publishing work to seek out as many diverse submissions as possible on this topic. Over 100 people contacted me from around the world, expressing interest in submitting an article about their research, a project, their library, archive, or museum exhibit.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic happened, I was laid off from my institution, and the world turned upside down for LGBTQ+ researchers everywhere.

Academics and practitioners around the world began to publish studies on the impact of COVID-19 on our mental health. It comes as no surprise that people from underserved and marginalized communities have suffered more from discrimination, violence, pandemic related losses, and mental health crises than those from affluent majority groups (Al-Ali, 2020; Beaman, 2020; Ivers & Walton, 2020; Matache & Bhabha, 2020). LGBTQ+ people around the world have also suffered from violence, discrimination, job loss, depression, anxiety, and isolation due to the pandemic (Gato et al., 2021; Kamal et al., 2021; Madrigal-Borloz, 2020). Pride festivals and parades were cancelled, favorite social spaces were shut down due to lockdowns, and we were even afraid to hug one another. People had to work from home, avoid public transportation, and reduce their time in potentially crowded spaces such as supermarkets, libraries, or museums. In some parts of the world, such as Hungary, Poland, England, and the U.S., LGBTQ+ people experienced an increase in anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes. These global disruptions took a toll on LGBTQ+ researchers’ abilities to complete their work during the pandemic (Deryugina et al., 2021; Maas et al., 2020; Sevelius et al., 2020). We needed to show compassion to our struggling community members and asked everyone to practice self-care during this trying time.

Many of the original people who requested to submit something for the special issue of this journal ended up dropping out of the project for reasons directly or indirectly related to the pandemic. Disproportionately these were people from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA),

sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Francophone countries. Some folx who worked in academia, libraries, archives, and museums experienced overwork and burnout during this time as they struggled to provide remote service and teaching or were forced to work on the front lines and interact with people who refused to comply with COVID-19 protocols. Some had the added burden of caregiving for children or relatives during this time. And those in countries where LGBTQ+ existence became more tenuous had to focus their reserve energies on survival, activism, or both. I want to acknowledge two global LGBTQ+ organizations who achieved some amazing things during this troubled time:

Wikimedia LGBTQ+, a global, multilingual thematic user group of LGBTQ+ Wikimedians who create and edit LGBTQ+ Wikimedia content, increased its number of active users by expanding its ICT presence to include Zoom gatherings and conferences, Telegram groups, and online edit-a-thons. Members from around the world also provided emotional support for one another as they experienced job loss, separation from partners or community, mental health issues, and discrimination within the global Wikimedia community and their home countries. During this time, Wikimedia LGBTQ+ was able to successfully advocate for grant funding to compensate volunteers with active leadership roles in the organization who may have lost their main source of income, and also in planning for online events still budgeted for childcare and Internet expenses for those Wikimedians who may have needed this assistance. This phenomenal show of online support has led to an increase in Wikimedia LGBTQ+ membership, linguistic inclusivity and accessibility at events, and international collaborations among LGBTQ+ and other marginalized Wikimedia groups around the world.

IFLA LGBTQ+ Special Interest Group, an international, multilingual group of LGBTQ+ librarians who create resources for international LGBTQ+ librarianship, reached out to one another via Zoom and social media to share good news about LGBTQ+ publications in their countries, new LGBTQ+ resource guides, and other positive works that had taken place in their libraries during the pandemic. For some librarians from countries hostile to LGBTQ+ visibility, the group meetings were an opportunity to be in a supportive space among friends.

I am introducing the special issue of this journal with this context, so that readers and critics know the challenges that our global community faced—that I faced—recruiting and retaining authors, getting articles ready for publication, and making this issue available. The authors and editors of these articles worked very hard during unprecedented times to meet our standards for publication, and they deserve compensation. Academic journals depend on the labor of people who have research and publication included in their paid workload. With so many academic lives disrupted, our authors and editors demonstrated great heart, courage, and sacrifice in seeing this work through. The editor in chief of this journal herself contracted COVID-19 and nearly died during this time as well. Remember this when you read these articles—that when the global LGBTQ+ community gives its time to these volunteer endeavors—particularly LGBTQ+ people of color, forcibly displaced people, immigrants, economically disadvantaged, chronically ill or disabled, and those who must write these articles in a language which may be their second, third, fourth, or fifth—we literally are giving our blood, sweat, and tears to conduct, write up, and disseminate our research.

“Queering Information: LGBTQ+ Memory, Interpretation, Dissemination”

How do we identify, categorize, describe, and preserve LGBTQ+ existence and experience? How do we make it known to the world? At the least, how do we inform fellow LGBTQ+ folx of the

existence of this information and history? The cover photo of this issue, a stained-glass mosaic of rainbow colors, symbolizes the diversity of such experiences, the complexity of making our existence known to researchers, and the wonder and joy that such work inspires, even if what we may present to the world triggers us or others.

Queering Information begins with two articles that address age-old challenges in LGBTQ+ Studies. In “Diversity Monitoring in the Library: Categorisation Practices and the Exclusion of LGBTQ Library Users”, Kevin Guyan demonstrates how LGBTQ+ people are underrepresented and often rendered invisible in library user studies—a systemic problem in all disciplines—and he provides solutions to remedy this problem in quantitative and mixed method studies. Meanwhile, in “‘She Started Wearing Men’s Clothing and Acting More Masculine’: Queering Historical Knowledge, Gendered Identity Making, and Trans Potentialities in Visual Information”, Travis Wagner presents the opposite problem—when archivists make assumptions about the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of people in photographs or video with insufficient historical or cultural context, which impacts the metadata used to describe subjects in those media and may overrepresent LGBTQ+ subjects in archival materials, or render them invisible. Wagner also provides solutions to these problems for archivists who want to categorize and describe ambiguous subjects as accurately as possible.

Projects that strive to capture the voices and experiences of invisible populations are the bright lights of LGBTQ+ information studies. In “What About Us? Preserving LGBTQ+ stories of forced displacement”, Renee Dixson employs her experience and perspective as a forcibly displaced person, in addition to existing scholarship and professional best practice, to build the Assembling Queer Displacements Archive to collect, document, categorize, and make accessible to researchers the experiences of LGBTQ+ forcibly displaced people from around the world. Meanwhile, in “History and Memory of Dissident Sexualities from Latin America: An Analysis of the Foundation, Current Activities, and Projects of AMAI LGBTQIA+”, Benito Bisso Schmidt and Rubens Mascarenhas Neto provide a crash history of LGBTQ+ existence in Latin America, how centuries of LGBTQ+ oppression in those regions have impacted development of LGBTQ+ special collections, archives, and museums in the region, and how LGBTQ+ archivists and activists from different Latin American countries came together to form a consortium to address these issues and provide support to each other in building up inclusive, intersectional collections and exhibits.

Just as massive gaps exist in the documentation and presentation of LGBTQ+ historical artifacts in Latin America and other non-English speaking regions of the world, so too do gaps in LGBTQ+ content exist in multiple language editions of Wikipedia as Marc Miquel Ribé, Andreas Kaltenbrunner, and Jeffrey Keefer illustrate through a history of international LGBTQ+ Wikipedia content creation and computational analysis in their article “Bridging LGBT+ Content Gaps Across Wikipedia Language Editions”. The issue ends with a public health information project presented by Curtis S. Tenney, Karl J. Surkan, Lynette Gerido, and Dawn Betts-Green: “A Crisis of Erasure: Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming Populations Navigating Breast Cancer”, which recommends how libraries can change the gendered narrative of who experiences certain health issues through the resources, services, and community collaborations that they provide.

The international authors of the articles for *Queering Information* have presented a wide range of challenges and solutions in the realm of identifying, categorizing, describing, and preserving LGBTQ+ existence and experience. They come from around the world and address issues of global concern to LGBTQ+ academics, librarians, archivists, museum professionals, data analysts, healthcare professionals, and information professionals everywhere. Not only do I invite you to

read their work, but please feel free to reach out to them with support for their endeavors during this time. They may be the first people in the field to identify and address a particular problem in the interdisciplinary, intersectional realm of LGBTQ+ information studies. They are my heroes, and I hope they become yours too.

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Rachel Wexelbaum (rswexelbaum@gmail.com) is the editor of *Queers Online: LGBT Digital Practices in Libraries, Archives, and Museums*. She has earned international acclaim for global LGBTQ+ Wikipedian engagement, LGBTQ+ librarianship, and the intersection of those two activities. Rachel has over twenty years' experience as a librarian and educator who has provided support and advocacy for marginalized communities.

