“WE JUST GET PUSHED ASIDE”: INFORMATION BEHAVIORS AND THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND QUEER WOMEN

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Megan Vladoiu

"WE JUST GET PUSHED ASIDE": INFORMATION BEHAVIORS AND THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND QUEER WOMEN

Over the past several decades, there has been increasing scholarly attention to the information needs and behaviors of LGBTQ+ populations, as well as the role of libraries in meeting those needs. However, with a few notable exceptions largely from the 1990s, there has been very little focus on the information needs of LGBTQ+ women in particular, despite evidence of a bias toward gay male perspectives in queer representation.

This research aims to help fill this gap by focusing on the intersection of the identities "LGBTQ+" and "woman" by asking two main questions: 1) What are the information needs and behaviors of lesbian, bisexual, and queer women? And 2) What role do libraries play in meeting the information needs of lesbian, bisexual, and queer women? Data collected in the form of survey responses and interviews with "information users" and librarians reveals the importance of community and representation and offers suggestions for how libraries can be viewed as a more welcoming resource for LGBTQ+ women. Additionally, librarians offer their perspectives on providing services to LGBTQ+ women during a time of increased political hostility and share some of the challenges libraries face.

This research contributes to the field of library and information science by focusing on the experiences and opinions of an often-overlooked demographic: lesbian, bisexual, and queer women. It suggests that this population has unique information needs not currently being adequately met. Finally, it shows libraries have the potential to be

vital information sources for lesbian, bisexual, and queer women, but are struggling to do so, due to a multitude of factors.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Over the past 30 years, academic scholars and library practitioners alike have increasingly focused their attention on the information needs and behaviors of, and barriers to, LGBTQ+ populations, as well as the role of libraries in meeting those needs. Topics such as collection development, library services, and subject indexing and metadata have proliferated in library literature. It is abundantly clear from examining the literature that libraries are often lacking in their collections and services to LGBTQ+ patrons.

While there has been an encouraging increase in research into LGBTQ+ information needs, there has tended to be a focus on health information needs (Fikar & Keith, 2004; Jia et al., 2022; Morris & Roberto, 2016); information needs of transgender individuals (Drake & Bielefield, 2017; Huttunen et al., 2020; Pohjanen & Kortelainen, 2016); or they focus broadly on the entire spectrum of LGBTQ+ people (Escobar, 2020; Kitzie, 2017; Schaller, 2011). While these contributions are deeply valuable in their own right, there is a risk in assuming the needs and experiences of lesbians, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) women are reflected in the needs and experiences of LGBTQ+ populations as a whole. For instance, it has been found that even when there is queer representation, it is often largely biased toward the gay male perspective (Goldthorp, 2007; Hicks & Kerrigan, 2020; Moulaison-Sandy et al., 2017). Additionally, while there is certainly overlap between the information needs related to gender identity and sexual orientation, as well as considerable overlap between transgender and minority sexual identities,[1] these needs are not identical. When studies do focus on LGBTQ+ identities as a whole, they often do not specify the sexual orientations of participants (e.g., Stewart & Kendrick, 2019),

[1] According to a 2023 study, only 17.6% of transgender respondents identified as straight/heterosexual, compared to 90.1% of cisgender respondents (Reisner et al., 2023).

allow for the selection of multiple sexual orientations by participants (e.g., Morris & Roberto, 2016), or they are unclear on how many participants are women, since the only category that we can extrapolate gender from is “lesbian”. For instance, Hays’ 2020 study included 29 responses, of which "the highest percentage selected bisexual at 44%, while 12.5% selected gay, 12.5% selected lesbian, 12.5% selected the genderless[2] term 'queer,' 9% selected asexual, 3% chose straight (but not cisgendered), and 6% opted to write their answers in" (p. 120). Similarly, for her 2019 dissertation, Escobar wanted to include a diverse sample and stated “every effort was made to gather equal representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, asexual, intersex, or any other person who does not identify as heterosexual” (p. 89); she had a sample size of 15 that was comprised of "nine participants [who] considered themselves bisexual, two as lesbian, one gay, one pansexual, and one asexual/demi sexual" (p. 91), as well as one participant who identified as queer. Finally, Schaller's 2011 study included six participants, of whom two were lesbians.[3]

According to Gallup data, in 2023 approximately 7.6% of Americans over the age of 18 identified as “something other than heterosexual” (Gallup, 2024c). Furthermore, approximately 22.3% of Generation Z (defined as born between 1997 and 2004) respondents identified as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, compared to 9.8% of Millennials (1980-1996) and 4.5% of Generation X (1965-1980); among these respondents, approximately 3% of Generation Z identified as lesbian, compared to 1.3% of Millennials and 0.7% of Generation X (Gallup, 2024b). Thus, we can see that despite concerns over the "obsoleteness"[4] of the lesbian identity, it

[2] Presumably, Hays’ description of queer as genderless is meant to refer to the fact that people of any gender can describe themselves as queer. Of course, this is also true of most of the terms included, such as bisexual, asexual, straight (but not cisgendered), and most likely gay (unless it was further specified as gay male.)
[3] The other four participants were two bisexual males, one gay male, and one straight female who was allowed to participate because “many of her friends [were] members of the LGBTQ community” (p.104). The validity of including a straight participant to understand the information needs of LGBTQ individuals is questionable.
[4] See for instance Volume 26, Issue 1 (2022) of *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, a special issue focusing on the question "Is lesbian identity obsolete?" I address my thoughts on this question in Chapter 4.

is actually on the rise. Additionally, the percentage of American women who identify as LGBT has increased from 6.4% in 2020 to 8.5% in 2023, compared to the percentage of American men identifying as LGBT, which actually decreased from 4.9% in 2020 to 4.7% in 2023 (Gallup, 2024a). This makes it particularly important to focus specifically on lesbian, bisexual, and queer women. Given these demographics, it is likely that the current, existing literature largely overlooks the experiences faced by lesbians, which may or may not be similar to those of their male counterparts. As pointed out by Goldthorp, "lesbian citizens are faced with the twin dynamic of gender discrimination and discrimination in terms of sexual orientation" (2007, p. 235).

At the same time, there have been unprecedented levels of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation attempts in the United States. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) tracked 510 anti-LGBTQ bills in 2023, 533 bills in 2024, and 616 bills in 2025.[5] As of May 2026, they were already tracking 529 bills (ACLU, 2023; 2024; 2025; 2026). These include bills targeting free speech and expressing and restricting student and educator rights, among other issues. There have also been bills targeting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives; as of May 2026, the Chronicle of Higher Education was tracking 152 anti-DEI bills, of which 32 have already become law (Chronicle Staff, 2026).[6]

There are very real consequences to anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments in general. Recent headlines include: a county in North Carolina fired eight out of nine library board trustees after they voted to keep a children's book about a transgender boy in the collection (Poveda, 2026); a library director in Tennessee was fired after refusing to move books with LGBTQ+ themes from the children's section to the adult section (Burris, 2026); and

[5] Note that this includes bills of multiple statuses: introduced, advancing, passed into law, defeated, and in court.
[6] Of these bills, 110 have been tabled, failed to pass, or been vetoed.

a county in Missouri banned Pride flags[7] from being displayed in public libraries (Colbert, 2026).

1.1 Research Goals

The research that does exist on the information needs of lesbians is largely relegated to the pre-ubiquitous internet era (Creelman & Harris, 1989; Rothbauer, 2007; Stenback & Schrader, 1999; Whitt, 1993), which makes it largely outdated, given the importance of the internet to LGBTQ+ populations. For example, one student surveyed by Stewart and Kendrick (2019) stated "I didn't think books would give me the information I would want when there is the internet" (p. 608). My research, therefore, aims to fill a gap within LIS research into LGBTQ+ patrons by identifying the information needs and behavior of lesbians, bisexual, and queer women, and how libraries meet those needs. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study to focus on the information needs and behaviors of all queer women, not only lesbians, and without age restrictions. Through this research, I investigate the following questions:

1. What are the information needs and behaviors of lesbian, bisexual, and queer women?
2. What role do libraries play in meeting the information needs of lesbian, bisexual, and queer women?

Key Terms

It is necessary to have a shared understanding of terminology used in scholarly research around this topic before reviewing prior literature. Terminology and particularly acronyms vary greatly depending on the time and geographic location of the research. The following glossary explains

[7] County officials claim the ban is to make the library "welcoming to everyone" and prevents the display of any flag besides the American or Missouri state flag.

terms and acronyms commonly seen in LIS literature. Resources from GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), the Human Rights Campaign, the University of California, Davis LGBTQIA Resource Center, and Michigan State University's Gender and Sexuality Campus Center were consulted for the following definitions. To begin, there are two terms that can be applied to both sexual orientation and gender identity.

Closeted: refers to someone who is not open about their sexual orientation. It is possible to be out to some people or in some circumstances, but not others "due to fear of rejection, harassment, violence, losing one's job, or other concerns" (GLAAD, 2022c).

Coming Out: refers to the process in which LGBTQ+ individuals "recognize, accept, typically appreciate, and often celebrate their sexual identity, sexuality, or gender identity/expression, either to themselves or others" (Gender and Sexuality Campus Center, Michigan State University, n.d.). Coming out and being out look different for different people and are not a possibility for all LGBTQ+ people.

Sexual Orientation

The following terms are related to sexual orientation. **Sexual orientation** refers to "a person's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person" and includes sexual identities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, and straight (GLAAD, 2022a).

Asexual: refers to "a complete or partial lack of sexual attraction or lack of interest in sexual activity with others" (Human Rights Campaign, 2023).

Bisexual (Bi): refers to someone whose attraction is toward people of more than one gender; "the *bi* in bisexual refers to genders the same as and different from one's own gender" (GLAAD, 2022c); while in the past bisexual has been conceptualized as being attracted to both men and

women, due to more widespread recognition of genders outside of the male/female binary, this is no longer considered to be an accurate definition.

Gay: refers to someone whose attraction is toward people of the same gender; traditionally has been associated with men, however, now is commonly used by people of all genders.

Lesbian: typically refers to a woman whose attraction is toward other women, although "some nonbinary people also identify as lesbians, often because they have some connection to womanhood and are primarily attracted to women" (UC Davis LGBTQIA Resource Center, 2015).

Pansexual: refers to people whose sexual attraction is toward people of all genders.

Queer: an umbrella or catch-all term used to describe anyone who falls outside mainstream sexual orientations or gender identities; historically used as a slur but has been reclaimed by many (but not all) LGBTQ+ people.

Questioning: refers to people exploring gender identity or sexual orientation.

Women Loving Women (WLW): refers to women who experience romantic or sexual attraction to other women. Some women who self-describe as WLW are exclusively attracted to women, while others may also be attracted to other genders.

Gender Identity

The following terms are related to gender identity. **Gender identity** refers to "a person's internal, deeply held knowledge of their own gender" that may or may not match the sex they were assigned at birth (GLAAD, 2022b).

Sex Assigned at Birth: at birth, infants are assigned a sex of 'male' or 'female' based on external anatomy. Note that "the development of the human body is a complex process, and sex

is not solely determined by anatomy, nor is it strictly binary. As many as 1.7% of people are born with an intersex trait" (GLAAD, 2022b).

Cisgender: refers to someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.

Intersex: describes a range of body variations outside the conventional definitions of biological/anatomical sex. This can include "variations in chromosome compositions, hormone concentrations, and external and internal characteristics" (UC Davis LGBTQIA Resource Center, 2015).

Nonbinary (non-binary): refers to someone who does not exclusively identify as a man or woman. "Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories" (Human Rights Campaign, 2023).

Transgender (Trans): refers to someone whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Two-Spirit: a culturally specific term "used by some Indigenous and First Nations people who are not cisgender and/or heterosexual" (GLAAD, 2022b). Should not be used for non-Indigenous people.

Acronyms

The most commonly seen acronyms are LGBT, LGBTQ, and LGBTQ+; however, all of the following can be observed.

LGB: lesbian, gay, bisexual.

LGBT: addition of transgender; sometimes written at GLBT.

LGBTQ: addition of queer/questioning.

LGBTQ+: indicates a recognition of other identities (+); the + can be added to the end of any of the other acronyms. Some authors may use * instead of +.

LGBTQI: addition of intersex.

LGBTQIA: addition of asexual.

LGBTQ2S: addition of Two-Spirit; sometimes written only as 2 instead of 2S.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

I begin by defining the concept of information needs and information behavior before reviewing relevant literature. Next, I discuss the larger body of literature related to LGBTQ+ library services, including collection management, library services, and subject indexing and metadata. Then, I briefly discuss libraries and marginalized identities beyond sexual orientation. Finally, and most pertinently, I give an overview of current research on lesbians and information studies.

2.1 Information Needs and Behavior

In this section, I define information needs and behavior and discuss research related to these topics within the broader LGBTQ+ context. Research focusing specifically on the information needs, behaviors, and barriers of lesbians is discussed in full in Chapter 2.6.

2.1.1 Information Needs

Information needs have been described as "one of the most central concepts within library and information science," without which "libraries and other information systems would cease to exist" (Naumer & Fisher, 2017, p. 2115). However, despite the importance of information needs to the field of LIS, Naumer and Fisher stated they have only been studied from a user perspective since the 1960s, and the precise definition of "information needs" remains difficult to pinpoint. Needs are considered distinct from wants or demands, and researchers have argued for considering how both librarians *and* users define information needs. For example, Green argued that "people can perfectly validly need things, whether or not they are aware of the need or (assuming they are) whether they desire them or not" (1990, pp. 66-7). He gave the example of a patron searching for a book: The patron may or may not *know* there is a library catalogue providing the location of the book, or they may not even *want* to use the catalogue. Regardless of

the patron's awareness or desire, they *need* the catalogue. While a commonly understood and succinct definition is "an information need is a gap between what you know and what you need to know to solve a problem or answer a question" (University of Suffolk Library, 2024), Green argued that information does not have to be lacking for it to be a need. Instead, he stated, "it is entirely possible to need something one already has" (p. 67). Applied to the earlier scenario of a patron searching for a book, using Green's definition, we could imagine a scenario where a patron knows of the catalogue's existence, but due to an aversion to the catalogue, has not used it.

2.1.2 Information Behavior

Information behavior, also referred to as information seeking behavior, is a "term used to describe the many ways in which human beings interact with information, in particular, the ways in which people seek and utilize information" (Bates, 2017, p. 2074). As Bates explained, information behavior studies were originally referred to as "'use studies,' studies of 'information seeking and gathering,' or studies of 'information needs and uses,'" and later "information-seeking research" (p. 2075). She stated that "information behavior" is the most commonly used term, and is preferred over "information seeking," which connotes "only explicit efforts to locate information" and excludes "the many other ways people and information interacted" (p. 2075). While the Library of Congress calls for using "information behavior" in subject headings, both terms remain in use.

Researchers have studied information behavior in a variety of fields, including health sciences (e.g., de Groote & Scoulas, 2024), business (e.g., Kim et al., 2022), education (e.g., Dahlqvist, 2021), and, of course, library and information science. Within LIS, there has been

research focused on the information behavior of different populations, such as university students (e.g., Gyesi, 2020), university faculty (e.g., Das & Mandal, 2021), and youth (e.g., Taylor, 2018).

2.1.3 LGBTQ+ Information Needs and Behavior

Information needs are not identical across groups of people, and many authors have worked to identify the needs of LGBTQ+ individuals, both within and outside a library context.

A literature review conducted in 2020 examined the needs of LGBTIQ+ users and the provision of LGBTIQ+ information resources (Matheson et al., 2020). The authors identified research information, identity formation, and well-being needs as key information needs, and pointed to fear, avoidance, privacy concerns, and lack of proper facilities and space as use barriers. They also suggested there is a need for "an updated examination of LGBTIQ+ users' views on how academic libraries might meet their specific needs" (p. 31). Similarly, in her 2019 dissertation titled "'A Library is a Place You Can Lose Your Innocence Without Losing Your Virginity': LGBTQAI+ Young Adults, Young Adult Literature & Sexuality Health Information Needs," Kristie L. Escobar identified three primary and two secondary information needs of LGBTQAI+ young adults.[8] The three primary needs she identified are mental health information, support against discrimination and self-advocacy information, and inclusive curriculum supporting everyday life information needs. The two secondary information needs are media role models and relationship information.

Wexelbaum (2018) looked at the needs of LGBTQ undergraduates to see if academic libraries were meeting their needs in the first formal study on the role academic libraries play in LGBT undergraduate life. The author argued that academic libraries need to be a safe space for

[8] While the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) defines young adulthood as 12 to 18 years old, since "there was the possibility of discussing topics sexual in nature," all of Escobar's participants were between 18 and 20 years old (p. 89).

students, and suggested, “the library still saves LGBT students in the twenty-first century—we just need more data to prove it” (p. 50). Hays (2020) looked to compare the use of the library in LGBTQ student centers versus main campus libraries and found that students reported either very high usage or no usage of the LGBTQ student center; however, students tended to report medium-high usage of the main library. Despite having more users, the main library could “do a better job of promoting a ‘safe space’ for LGBTQ students to do LGBTQ research” (p. 120). There was a low awareness of resources for locating LGBTQ materials, and Hays noted that “students will not access what they are not aware of or cannot find” (p. 124).

In her 2011 research on the information needs of LGBTQ college students, Schaller stated, “the research proved that LGBTQ students can still be considered a consumer group chronically underserved by university libraries” and “there is a need for more accessibility and promotion of services, but…a strong desire for privacy and confidentiality exists, especially for younger students (p. 100). Schaller used a short survey as well as focus groups and individual interviews to collect data; unfortunately, however, her sample size was very small. Of the six participants, five mentioned friends in the LGBTQ community as a helpful source of information. Social, political, and legal marginalization was mentioned as an LGBTQ issue of interest five times, while “LGBTQ and religion” was mentioned four times (p. 106). All six participants agreed that LGBTQ individuals have special information needs. Additionally, all six participants said they either have used or occasionally use libraries to meet their information needs. However, participants also mentioned concerns over privacy and confidentiality, as well as confusion over search vocabulary and the online catalogue. Overall, the participants reported not wanting to interact with librarians or ask questions. For instance, “one participant, when she was asked if she uses the reference services in libraries, said ‘When you are questioning yourself,

you don't want other people to question you," (p. 107). Other participants mentioned that "it is in general an intimidating situation for them to ask questions in the library" due to librarians not seeming approachable, looking busy, or being unfriendly (p. 107). Furthermore, participants suggested that they can either find materials themselves or they give up, with one participant expressing concern that they don't know what librarians will do with their information. Schaller noted none of the participants had mentioned experiencing outright homophobia in the library, "besides the normal expressions of antipathy that are existent everywhere" (p. 107).

Beyond academic libraries, authors have argued that public and school libraries need to be safe spaces for LGBT2Q+ youth (Knapp, 2022). Knapp offered suggestions for how library administration might create such safe spaces, such as "fostering a sense of community" and creating "a collection that looks *beyond* heteronormativity" (p. 854). Similarly, Bain and Podmore argued that "for LGBTQ2S patrons, libraries can be sites of inclusion and empowerment, however, many factors influence whether a library is interpreted as a queer-friendly space" (2020, p. 601). In Croatian public libraries, a comparison of LGBTIQ library users and non-users found that people were not satisfied with the amount and recency of materials, and of the two-thirds of respondents who were library users, only one-third had borrowed LGBTIQ materials (Pikić & Barbarić, 2020).

Several articles have focused on whether libraries are meeting the needs of transgender patrons (Drake & Bielefield, 2017; Huttunen et al., 2020; Krueger, 2017). While Huttunen et al. were interested in understanding the early-stage information needs of transgender people in Finland, they did not emphasize libraries' roles in fulfilling those needs. The other two articles focused heavily on whether libraries were meeting the needs of transgender patrons; both suggested that the answer to this question was no. A survey of transgender adults found that

library collections were insufficient, and many individuals reported having experienced discrimination or feared experiencing discrimination when utilizing reference services (Drake & Bielefield, 2017). Furthermore, some reported discrimination from other library staff, while others did not report discrimination but said librarians were uninformed. The survey found the most important library accommodations for transgender patrons were "recent transgender literature collection," which was mentioned by 93% of participants, "gender identity and expression as part of their non-discrimination policy; gender neutral, single stall bathroom where you do not need to request a key; and recent LGB/queer literature in the collection," all of which were mentioned by 92% of participants (p. 165). Similarly, Krueger called for increased equity and inclusion training for librarians and offered suggestions for how libraries can better meet transgender users' needs (2017).

In addition to research into user needs, there has also been increasing research into use and access barriers. It is notable that the same information barriers discussed in 2017 and later had been previously discussed in 2007, suggesting a lack of significant progress in a decade. Authors have approached the topic of information access barriers from three angles: reviewing current literature, surveying LGBTQ students, and analyzing library research guides. After a review of literature on the topic, Pierson (2017) pointed to reasons such as societal conditions, interpersonal barriers, the digital divide, descriptive practices, inadequate collections and mediation services, geographic barriers, affective barriers, and inaction as a barrier. Stewart and Kendrick (2019) were similarly concerned with barriers, and they conducted a survey of LGBT college students. The most common barriers they identified from the survey were information vacuum (e.g., "not much information to find"), LGBT stigma, and the library (e.g., sources

outdated), while less common barriers were bisexual erasure, spaces (e.g., bathroom bans), and "other" (e.g., being bullied) (p. 607).

Nearly identical barriers had been identified over a decade earlier, including "social isolation and lack of awareness of LGBTQ people," "no formalized support and institutional protection," "cloak of invisibility surrounding LGBTQ concerns and negative stereotyping," "inadequate information support services," and "lack of provision of adequate and fair services" (Mehra & Braquet, 2007, pp. 553-4). The authors articulated these and five others as the top 10 barriers and challenges and offered suggestions for what librarians needed to do to combat them. Some suggestions were more feasible than others. For example, to combat the issue of "inadequate information support services and no awareness of existing resources," they suggested information professionals should "develop accurate, honest, and fair LGBTQ information resources and collections and promote visibility by proactive advertising" (p. 554). Other suggestions were less feasible, for instance, in response to the issue of "lack of political representation," the authors suggested information professionals "participate actively in political lobbying and building political support networks" (p. 553). Not only is political lobbying far outside a librarian's job description, it could also put them at a very real risk for losing their job.

Despite multiple investigations into LGBTQ+ user needs and barriers, there has been less research into librarian perceptions of LGBTQ+ user needs. As previously discussed, there are many LGBTQ+ potential library users who avoid library use out of fear of discrimination or concern regarding librarians' knowledge and ability to help. A recent study surveyed librarians, library staff, and MLS/MLIS students about their comfort and skill in providing information related to LGBTQ+ themes (Siegel et al., 2020). The majority of respondents (87.6%) responded "agree" or "strongly agree" regarding their confidence in serving LGBTQ+ information needs;

however, 79.3% responded that they would benefit from training. While this study is encouraging, the authors do caution that 29% of their respondents identified as LGBTQ, which "while…useful in gauging the behaviors and perspectives of LGBTQ librarians…probably skewed the aggregate responses" (p. 138).

2.2 Collection Management

Collection development and management is a key function of libraries, and ensuring a collection reflects the needs of the community is a priority. At the same time, libraries in the United States have been facing unprecedented challenges. In 2023, the ALA reported "Censors targeted 2,571 unique titles in 2022, a 38% increase from...2021. Of those titles, the vast majority were written by or about members of the LGBTQIA+ community or by and about Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color" (American Library Association, 2023). Three years later, they reported "attempts to censor more than 4,200 unique titles in 2025, nearly 2,000 more titles than 2024 and only five fewer than 2023's record… Approximately 91.7% of the titles challenged in 2025 were targeted by pressure groups and government decision makers" (American Library Association, 2026). Unfortunately, while attempts at censorship are at an all-time high, non-inclusive collections have been identified going back to the beginning of the 20th century (Monroe, 1988; Passet, 2012). Thus, it is unsurprising that many scholars and librarians have been interested in questions of collection development and collection analysis, making it the largest and longest spanning theme. Though Passet's article was published in 2012, it examined library collections from 1900 to 1969. As shown in figure 1, collection management is a theme that became popular in the early 2010s and has continued to grow in the 14 years since.

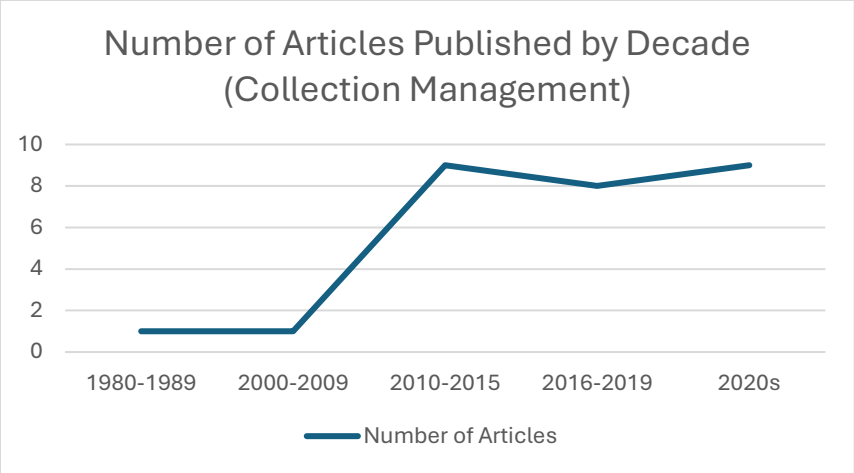

Figure 1. The number of articles that discuss LGBTQ+ collection development from 1980 to 2023.

Catalog checklists are a common method of investigating collections (Bain & Podmore, 2020; Bosman, 2016; Brendler et al., 2017; Chapman & Birdi, 2016; Garry, 2015; Hughes-Hassell et al., 2013; Passet, 2012; Proctor, 2020; Tudor et al., 2023; Williams & Deyoe, 2014, 2015). Other authors have used interviews or surveys to analyze collections and understand the reasons behind the state of collections (Attwell, 2020; Bain & Podmore, 2020; Becnel & Moeller, 2022; Betts-Green, 2020; Chapman & Birdi, 2016; Garry, 2015; Goldthorp, 2007; Hart & Mfazo, 2010; Oltmann, 2016).

Public, academic (college/university), and school (kindergarten-12th grade) libraries are all represented in the research. Specialized collections, including Protestant libraries (Bosman, 2016), Jewish libraries (Stahl & Kushner, 2014), and Spanish-language collections (Bosman, 2023), have also been studied. However, regardless of library types, nearly all the articles on collection management identified room for improvement. Research has found that materials for LGBTQ patrons are outdated, inaccurate, and judgmental (Blackburn & Farooq, 2020; Monroe, 1988; Stewart & Kendrick, 2019), favor adult gay male representation over other identities (Hicks & Kerrigan, 2020), or are otherwise lacking (Becnel & Moeller, 2022; Chapman & Birdi, 2016; Goldthorp, 2007; Hart & Mfazo, 2010; Hughes-Hassell et al., 2013; Passet, 2012;

Williams & Deyoe, 2014, 2015). While Brendler et al. (2017) noted that some libraries "offered very representative collections," they also found several libraries that had "very few of the titles on our list and few materials for LGBTQ* teens in general" (p. 16). One article found that while an estimated 5.9% of American students identify as LGBTQ, the average percentage of LGBTQ themed titles in school libraries was only 0.4% (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2013). Books with transgender characters or content are even more uncommon (Movius, 2018; Tudor et al., 2023), which leads to low levels of satisfaction among transgender patrons (Drake & Bielefield, 2017). LGBTQ characters of color in young adult novels are also lacking, further "limit[ing] access to meaningful representation for LGBTQ and gender non-conforming youth of color" (Austin, 2019, p. 91).

While there is abundant research into collection management, there is less focus on the presence of negative titles. One author noted, "Some LGBTQ* literature runs the risk of featuring outdated or negative content, so a title purporting to have LGBTQ* content is not necessarily enough" (Brendler et al., 2017, p. 5). In a study focused on materials held by Protestant college libraries, the author compared the presence of GLBT "affirming" and "non-affirming" religious texts (Bosman, 2016). While this particular case was focused on books about religion and homosexuality, it serves as a caution for general collection analysis. For example, the Library of Congress subject heading "Homosexuality—Religious aspects—Christianity" appeared in both "affirming" and "non-affirming" title records; if one were to simply count the number of titles under this subject heading, they would not necessarily realize that some of the titles were negative toward LGBTQ+ identities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the study found more libraries held non-affirming titles than affirming titles, despite increases in accepting Protestant denominations.

Several potential reasons have been offered to explain gaps in collections. In many cases, the lack of a selection criteria policy or a policy for handling complaints led to librarians refraining from purchasing LGBTQ books (Becnel & Moeller, 2022; Betts-Green, 2020; Hicks & Kerrigan, 2020; Williams & Deyoe, 2015; Yan Lee & Freedman, 2010). While Tudor et al. (2023) argued that there was no evidence of self-censorship regarding controversial books based on linear regression comparing school size and number of titles, other studies did find librarians engaged in self-censorship to avoid complaints, especially in school libraries in conservative areas (Becnel & Moeller, 2022; Oltmann, 2016).

There are at least two potential reasons for Tudor et al.'s findings:

1) They based their conclusion on the number of titles compared to the expected number of titles based on the size of the school, while researchers with conflicting results had talked directly to librarians, and
2) Their study looked at "controversial books," not solely books with LGBTQ content, which could greatly skew the results. For example, while they report "findings indicate 81% of school library collections contained either the expected number of controversial titles or above the expected range based on their enrollment and district size..." (15), there was a large difference in the mean number of books with transgender (22%) or LGBTQ (27%) content compared to the mean number of books with drinking/drug use (41%) or profanity (45%) (Tudor et al., 2023).

While this research has potential significance in its own right, without differentiating between types of "controversial" books, it cannot be concluded that librarians do not self-censor LGBTQ+ materials. Even when libraries have diverse holdings in some ways, they may be lacking in others. For instance, an earlier study examined collections of diverse youth books

(Williams & Deyoe, 2014). This study found 15% of the libraries included (237 academic libraries, 326 public libraries, and 207 school libraries) did not hold any of the 116 LGBTQ titles from their checklist. However, they also found that of these 770 libraries, "31...held at least 10% of the 964 titles on race/ethnicity checklist, and 35 held at least 20% of the 334 titles on the disability checklist" (p. 110). If the diversity checklist titles had been taken as a whole, the conclusion might have been that the library collections were diverse while missing the fact that 15% of the libraries held no LGBTQ titles. Furthermore, a 2015 study of 120 Ohio school libraries found "almost 70% of the libraries held less than a quarter of the titles on the LGBTQ list, while only 2% contained less than a quarter of the control list titles. Conversely, 80% of libraries owned more than half of the control list titles, while only 8% of them shelved more than half of the LGBTQ titles" (Garry, 2015, p. 81) While it is possible Tudor et al.'s librarians were not engaging in self-censorship, it is also possible they were unconcerned about profanity or alcohol use in books, but avoided books with LGBTQ characters, which would not be accounted for in the authors' findings, but would be an example of self-censorship.

Self-censorship can be caused by different scenarios, such as fear of pushback. Multiple librarians reported they were concerned about being challenged by principals, parents, and conservative communities (Becnel & Moeller, 2022; Betts-Green, 2020; Brendler et al., 2017; Garry, 2015; Oltmann, 2016). One librarian mentioned her predecessor leaving the job because she was tired of fighting and predicted a similar future for herself (Betts-Green, 2020). In some cases, a disconnect was found between a librarian's values and their actions. In one case, while most librarians agreed that equal information access and services were a human right, only half considered LGBT people when making selections (Hart & Mfazo, 2010), while in another case,

all participating librarians said it was important and valuable to collect LGBT materials, but they did not necessarily do so (Oltmann, 2016).

Other librarians, however, had different reasons for not acquiring LGBTQ materials. Some argued it was not necessary to purchase LGBTQ materials because they did not have many or even any LGBTQ students/patrons (Becnel & Moeller, 2022; Betts-Green, 2020; Garry, 2015) or because they felt their LGBTQ patrons were satisfied with what was being offered (Attwell, 2020).

A 2013 column addressed several common self-censorship "traps" librarians can fall into, and in fact can be observed in other articles (Antell et al., 2013).

These traps included:

- "It's hard to find books."
- "They don't circulate."
- "What will it say about me?"
- "There aren't any (or many) LGBT people in my community."
- "I don't have the money in my budget."

The authors pointed out that an important part of a librarian's job is to know where to find information, and while information on LGBT-themed books is less mainstream, it does exist. Regarding the idea that LGBT books do not circulate, they argued that while this statistically may be true, librarians must look beyond circulation statistics. "Stealth library use" or "under the radar browsing" is common among the LGBT community, particularly children and young adults, due to fear of checking the books out or taking them home (p. 105). The authors offered a somewhat cheeky response to "What will it say about me?," with one saying that she had recently purchased a graphic account of a sociopathic serial killer and "it's been

circulating quite well, and I am pleased to report that I have not had to answer to any concerned community members who fear that I might be a serial killer or that I support the activities of serial killers" (p. 105). Taking a more serious tone, she stated that community judgment and backlash is a real concern, but cautioned, "to allow discomfort to halt your efforts would be unprofessional at best, unethical at worst" (p. 106). In response to the trap of thinking that there are not LGBT people in the community, the authors pointed out that, according to research, between 3 and 10 percent of the population is LGBT, and while LGBT adults might choose to live in larger, more metropolitan cities, LGBT youth don't have that choice. Finally, they argued that while budgets are certainly lacking, it is not an excuse for not purchasing LGBT material.

Surprisingly, however, budgetary restraints were not necessarily the most important factor responsible for underdeveloped collections. While Betts-Green did have librarians who mentioned funding as a barrier to LGBTQ resources, including one librarian who was working with "$2500 budgeted...for all materials" in a library "with a service area of over 30,000" (2020, p. 522), this finding was not true across the board. For instance, Garry noted that while it would be expected that libraries with smaller budgets might be more careful to avoid controversial titles that may be challenged and removed from the collection, and libraries with larger budgets may focus more on diverse collections, interviews with librarians did not support this. In fact, "the most generously funded library...employed a librarian who proudly censored the collection, while many sparsely funded school libraries...managed to have some diversity" (2015, p. 83). Similarly, Williams and Deyoe stated, "while it is understandable that a library spending less than $5,000 a year will not be able to purchase many youth diversity titles, it is disturbing to find that so many libraries, including many that spend more than $100,000 annually...did not achieve a minimal rating..." (2014, p. 115).

Several authors have presented case studies of libraries that have improved their collection development and offer suggestions for others, such as engaging the community to expand collections (Pavenick & Martinez, 2021), weeding out collections of outdated information (Blackburn & Farooq, 2020), and establishing collection policies (Yan Lee & Freedman, 2010).

In several cases, it was the personal identification of a gap that led to articles discussing collection management. In the case of Yan Lee and Freedman, they described an anecdote in which a librarian endeavored to read only lesbian themed fiction during Queer History Month. However, "when trying to identify lesbian fiction titles with literary merit, she found that they were hard to locate and underrepresented in mainstream publishing, and even in libraries" (2010, p. 22). From this situation arose the idea to create a collection of lesbian fiction, enhancing the women's studies collection at Barnard, a women's liberal arts college. Similarly, Stahl and Kushner (2014), upon discovering they could not locate even one study on the needs of LGBTQ patrons in Jewish libraries, wrote an article "discuss[ing] the challenges involved specifically when considering LGBTQ Jewish materials in Jewish libraries" (p. 17) and provided annotated bibliographies of "essential holdings for a range of Jewish libraries" (p. 22). They stated, "they take as a given that all libraries should include materials on LGBTQ issues" (p. 17) and argued "in addition to ALA's Bill of Rights, Jewish libraries have a special ethical imperative based on foundational Jewish values to supply information to a vulnerable minority" (p. 22).

2.3 Library Services

As early as 1992, librarians were calling for better services to LGBTQ patrons and attempting to clear up myths, including ideas that librarians collected all books equally, that there were no LGBTQ people interested in using libraries, or that books about AIDS were sufficient

representation (Gough & Greenblatt, 1992). More than 30 years later, calls for better services persist.

Overall, there is a continued theme of libraries not doing enough in their services to LGBTQ+ patrons. There has been very little empirical research into the experiences of LGBTQ+ patrons at the reference desk, and the most commonly cited article on the topic is a 2005 study out of Canada; this unobtrusive observational study featuring a proxy seeking LGBTQ+ related information found that based on reference librarian behavior, the proxy would only return to 40% of the libraries due to librarians' inability to help or perceived discomfort and hostility (Curry, 2005). In their study of transgender library patrons, Drake and Bielefield (2017) reported that the majority of participants stated they had never used library reference services due to fear of discrimination. Participants who had engaged in reference interactions reported both outright discrimination, with one stating "'[I dealt with] … [...staff with] clear distaste in dealing with me and my questions," as well as ignorance, with another participant saying "It was not actively negative, but the reference librarian certainly didn't understand until I went over several basic definitions..." (p. 164). Mehra and Braquet (2011) similarly suggested that libraries needed to improve their reference services in particular to LGBTQ students, noting "LGBTQ students have and continue to find their campus climate a 'chilly' one in which to thrive" (p. 403). Anecdotal evidence suggests people may be more comfortable asking "sensitive" questions regarding sexuality and gender in an anonymous online environment than in person (Thompson, 2010).

Regarding programming, several articles have looked specifically at drag queen storytimes (DQS), a program that has received particular attention over the past several years. Naidoo (2018) offered suggestions for planning and implementing DQS based on a survey and analysis of current programs, noting their potential importance for LGBTQ families. One study

found that 74% of respondents came from libraries that had not hosted DQS; however, 98% of respondents reported seeing news stories about such programs (Barriage et al., 2021). Another study by the same set of authors found librarians emphasized "hypervisible discourses framing drag storytimes as unsafe and inappropriately sexualized [that] are often produced by the concerted efforts of a group or several groups inside and external to the library's service area" (Kitzie et al., 2022, pp. 233-4).

As seen with collection management, financial barriers were not an issue for the majority of libraries when it came to the decision to (not) host DQS (Barriage et al., 2021); however, fears over community reactions were a factor. Kitzie et al. (2022) suggested: "narrow definitions of community and patrons that largely exclude queer people can also lead to acts of self-censorship, such as cancelling drag storytimes to conform with 'community needs'" (p. 234). However, they also acknowledge real safety concerns, noting two library staff members had received death threats over DQS.

In secondary schools in the United Kingdom, it has been suggested that school libraries see low use from LGBTQ teens due to invisibility and fear of using the library, and survey data showed the provision of materials and other inclusive activities would be highly valued by students (Walker & Bates, 2016). Librarians tended to report being positive about such ideas; however, their actions toward inclusion varied. In American school libraries, Moorefield-Lang and Kitzie (2018) discussed the importance of LGBTQ inclusion in makerspaces and offered suggestions for creating an inclusive environment. They noted research has shown LGBTQ individuals "do not necessarily view a library as a trustworthy information source for identity-related information" and suggest "LGBTQ youth may begin to exercise more trust in libraries that host inclusive makerspaces" (p. 48).

Public libraries have also faced scrutiny. One author argued "in considering social justice, many commentators overlook (or disregard) the needs of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning, or intersex (LGBTQI), assuming, for example, that they do not require any particular support or recognition" (Vincent, 2015, p. 285). Furthermore, he argued "[t]he cultural sector, including public libraries, can play a huge part in combating prejudice by providing safe, informed (and informative) spaces where people can explore who they are, and be who they are as well. However, not all public libraries understand this, or want to play this role" (p. 285). Robinson (2016) similarly argued that LGBTQ and gender variant youth are being excluded in American public libraries, pointing out an overall lack of LIS research into LGBTQ information needs and particularly LGBTQ youth. She criticized that in many cases "annual minority-themed book displays have added up to the 'public libraries' best efforts' to reach African-American, Asian American, Latino, and sexual minority patrons" (p. 172). Naidoo (2013) discussed the importance of services and programs not only to LGBTQ patrons but to children in LGBTQ families and offered suggestions for implementing services.

Services to LGBTQ patrons in academic libraries have been discussed as well; interestingly, in several cases, researchers include LGBTQ identities as part of a larger discussion rather than on their own. Switzer (2008) shared a range of diversity initiatives undertaken at Oakland University aiming to support minority racial groups, international students, graduate/returning/transfer students, distance learners, and at-risk students in addition to LGBTQ students, while Conley et al. (2019) included suggestions for serving LGBTQ students under the umbrella of supporting students "with histories of trauma" (p. 256). While these are all groups deserving of attention, including LGBTQ identities as a paragraph or two within a larger article contributes to the lack of overall LIS research noted by Robinson (2016).

Research specifically examining LGBTQ patrons and academic libraries has found mixed results. Todorinova and Ortiz-Myers (2019) found even among the Campus Pride Index's Best 25 LGBTQ-friendly colleges and universities,[9] libraries were not meeting the Campus Pride criteria despite having friendly librarians and significant scholarly resources, stating: "providing these academic collections and having individual compassion towards LGBTQ students (as important as both are) do not necessarily accomplish the proactive level of support that seems to be required by the Campus Pride classification" (p. 80).

2.4 Subject Indexing and Metadata

While not a service on its own, per se, subject indexing and metadata form the backbone of libraries. They are also topics that have garnered much attention and criticism from scholars; many have described issues within commonly used classification systems and metadata schemas. Library of Congress Subject Headings have been highly criticized by multiple authors who pointed out problems such as the "othering" of historically marginalized people (e.g., Howard & Knowlton, 2018; Roberto, 2011), contributions to "the creation of library environments that are passively hostile to transgender users" (Roberto, 2011, p. 56), and lack of discoverability of LGBTQ materials (Bates & Rowley, 2011; Howard & Knowlton, 2018). Edge (2019) reviewed literature on classification and organization systems in order to examine subject access to LGBTIQ materials, which was found to be largely lacking. Howard and Knowlton (2018) pointed out that librarians are in the habit of telling patrons to look at the shelves around a particular book to see if there are similar books of interest, but they argued that this is difficult to

[9] The Campus Pride Index is a measurement of LGBTQ friendliness on college and university campuses. It is based on a questionnaire that examines LGBTQ policy inclusion, support and institutional commitment, academic life, student life, housing, campus safety, counseling and health, and recruitment and retention efforts (Todorinova & Ortiz-Myers, 2019).

do when looking for LGBTQIA books, which are often spread out around the library. Similarly, Golub et al. (2022) found that users tended to be frustrated with books not being labeled with LGBTQI keywords, making them difficult to find; this was echoed in their follow-up study with librarians (2023). One librarian stated: "[B]ooks I know are LGBTQI often do not have those keywords," while another said: "[W]e have worked on subject indexing in our catalogue…but…newer materials have more subject headings than older materials and…not all books with…similar content always have the same subject headings" (2023, p. 267).

Authors have examined different solutions for the problems with metadata and subject indexing, such as the use of alternative practices through LibraryThing folksonomy (Bates & Rowley, 2011) and creating user-informed databases and LGBTQI thesauri such as Homosaurus (Cifor & Rawson, 2023; Golub et al., 2022, 2023; Hardesty & Nolan, 2021; Hutchinson & Nakatomki, 2023). Dobreski et al. (2022) found that "despite LCSH's long, iterative history of development and the faceted, post-coordinate nature of LCDGT (Library of Congress Demographic Group Terms), neither vocabulary was found to be adequate in covering the complex, LGBTQ+ identities represented in the Homosaurus" (p. 490). Drabinski (2013), however, suggested the responsibility for correcting the problems with subject indexing may fall on public services librarians rather than catalogers.

Cifor (2016) examined how topics such as hate mail, hate crimes, and self-hatred are organized in LGBTQ archives, recognizing her own "descriptive failure" in labeling a folder filled with hate mail as "Correspondence: Criticism. 1994-1998," a decision she stated "flattened and potentially hid forever…the powerful affects within the letters…" (p. 757). In another examination of metadata quality in LGBTQ+ digital community archives, it was found that metadata was inconsistent and achieved only the minimum in many cases (Kord, 2022). Clarke

and Schoonmaker (2019) found metadata schemas themselves to be lacking with regard to their ability to accurately indicate diversity in creators and content.

2.5 Libraries and Marginalized Identities

The importance of libraries to marginalized and minoritized individuals has been written about widely with regard to race and ethnicity. Some studies have suggested that library spaces and services are more heavily utilized by students of color than white students (e.g., Herrera, 2016; Whitmire, 2006; Yoo-Lee et al., 2013); however, it has also been found that despite higher usage, students of color feel that the library is less welcoming than white students do (Elteto et al., 2008). Furthermore, foreign-born students often view the library favorably, with foreign-born students of color using libraries as study spaces more than white foreign-born students (Albarillo, 2018). It is not uncommon for students of color to make comments suggesting library staff's facial expressions are not "welcoming" or that libraries should "have a more diverse group of people working" (Elteto et al., 2008, p. 333). These comments are echoed in extant research into libraries and LGBTQ+ patrons as well. One study, for example, found that 87% of respondents mentioned openly LGB/queer staff as a necessary library accommodation (Drake & Bielefield, 2017, p. 165) while another reported that library staff were "sometimes very sarcastic or unfriendly in their tone" (Schaller, 2011, p. 107).

2.6 Lesbians and Information Studies

From 1990 to 2004, there was a small surge in research into lesbian information studies, though the majority of this research contained fairly limited samples. In 1989, Creelman and Harris published (to the best of their, and my, knowledge) the first empirical study on the information needs of lesbians. In this study, they interviewed 50 Canadian lesbians about their information needs at a particular point in their life, i.e., when they were coming out. The initial participants

were contacted through gay community associations, and from there, a snowball sample method was used. Of course, this method of finding participants required the women involved to be out to the extent that they 1) were involved in the gay community or were known to be gay by others in the community, and 2) were willing to be interviewed. Of the respondents, 84% reported being aware of the library as a resource for gay information; however, only 46% reported seeking help from libraries. The resource with the next highest awareness was gay bars, at 62%. Many of the women in the study (78%) reported that they tried to find information in books, but four main barriers led to 53% reporting that reading had not helped them: "(1) they could not find any relevant materials, (2) the resources focused on the experiences of gay men rather than those of lesbians, (3) the materials consulted did not contain practical lifestyle information, or (4) the materials were depressing and negative" (p. 39).

Three years later, when Whitt wrote her 1993 article on the information needs of lesbians, she argued that of the handful of articles written about the needs of gay and lesbian library users, only one previous study had directly asked users (Creelman & Harris, 1989). All other research, she argued, had presented what librarians thought gay and lesbian patrons needed. Since Creelman and Harris had specifically focused on information needs at the time of coming out, there were no studies on lesbians' information needs throughout their lives. Given this gap, Whitt sought to gain the perspective of lesbians regarding their information needs and library usage. Her survey involved a survey of lesbians in North Carolina. The survey was distributed through a lesbian newsletter, and 619 copies were sent out, of which 141 were returned.

Whitt found that many lesbians looked for information in libraries, particularly when they were first coming out. She suggested, "because finding the lesbian community is in itself an information need, the library, as a known and trusted information resource, may be the only

known resource available (p. 285). The majority of her respondents were occasional library users (3-12 times a year) or frequent library users (more than once a month), at 31.2% and 34.6%, respectively. A further 14.2% were regular users, 17% used the library a few times a year, and only 2.8% never used the library. Additionally, 74.1% of respondents stated they occasionally asked for assistance in libraries. Unfortunately, Whitt also found that many lesbians found libraries to be a disappointing resource. Respondents mentioned materials were often dated and limited, difficult to locate due to poor subject indexing or being physically hidden, and librarians were judgmental and lacked knowledge. Whitt also noted "generally, women felt that collections on materials on gay men were more extensive than lesbian-related collections" (p. 286). Academic libraries were found to have better collections than public libraries, though they needed improvement as well.

By not focusing on information needs at a single point in time, Whitt was able to identify several different changes in the information needs reported by her participants throughout their lives. For some respondents, after they had been out for a while, fiction became more important than factual information. Others reported becoming more specific and discerning with their information needs instead of wanting any information they could find. Overall, Whitt states, "for each woman who said her information needs were decreasing, there was a woman who said she needed more information" (p. 280).

Inspired by the work of Schroeder (1993)[10] and Whitt (1993), Seidel wanted to continue the conversation of lesbians and libraries. Her 1998 article "The 'Invisibles': Lesbian Women as Library Users" summarized several events attended by lesbian library staff and lesbian library

[10] Schroeder, Kerstin (1993). Aus dem Schrank in die Regale, Bunch und Bibliothek, 45, no. 1, 66-74. The article title translates roughly to "From the closet to the shelves". Schroeder also translated Seidel's article into English from the original German.

users that took place during the July 1994 Women's Summer University (Munich, Germany) and the October 1994 Berlin Lesbian Week (Berlin, Germany). She stated, "lesbians and gays are often 'invisible' in their communities because, for fear of verbal abuse, discrimination, and physical violence, they often set great store in not being recognizable as homosexuals. Therefore, they hardly announce their information needs to libraries" (Seidel, 1998, p. 35). However, she says previous research had found that lesbians would like to see "poetry, fiction with lesbian topics and/or lesbian protagonists, autobiographies, self-help literature for lesbian mothers, and information for lesbian employees. To summarize, one can say that lesbians *also* but *not only* want to read about heterosexuals" (p. 35). Seidel noted two main issues encountered by lesbians in libraries: the first is collections, the second is staff. Regarding collections, she reported that there was often a lack of material for lesbians, and that the material that existed about homosexuality was often about gay men; material was often outdated and suggested that lesbianism was an illness or phase; materials were not catalogued well and were difficult to locate; and, finally, materials were rarely presented to the public. One suggestion included rejecting the use of the terms "homosexuality" and "homosexual," as those were usually applied to gay men, not lesbians. Other suggestions included examining the collections, weeding out outdated material and replacing it with new materials, using better terminology to describe materials, and announcing new acquisitions in lesbian publications.

In 1999, Stenback and Schrader sought to replicate Creelman and Harris' earlier research. They also interviewed lesbian women in Canada, began with a local lesbian organization, and then used a snowball sampling method. This sampling method meant, as with the work of Creelman and Harris, that the study was limited to women who were out enough to be part of a lesbian organization, or to be known to members; Stenback and Schrader recognized this

limitation. Furthermore, while Creelman and Harris had 50 participants, only 10 women participated in Stenback and Schrader's study, creating a small sample. Of their participants, seven mentioned gay bars as a source of information that they were aware of, while five mentioned public libraries as an information source. Five participants mentioned that they had indeed searched for information in public libraries, which was the second most common response after printed sources (mentioned by six participants). Stenback and Schrader reported "all ten women expressed concerns about reaching out, about making connections with other lesbians, and about understanding themselves in relation to a group identity of lesbianism" (p. 43). Unfortunately, as with other studies, they found that participants had experienced mixed success with public libraries, noting three main barriers: "lack of materials…difficulties in locating information…homophobia among library staff" (p. 43). Several women stated that the books in libraries were outdated or negative, while another described them as "textbook" and "clinical." Some women had outright negative experiences at the library, with the authors recounting

> …the experience of one woman who had not considered her feelings shameful until she took a book up to the counter of her local public library to check it out. The woman working at the desk read the title of the book, stopped for a few seconds, looked up with her mouth open, and shook her head. The prospective borrower was mortified, and said it took years for her to go back to the library to look for lesbian and gay materials (p. 45).

Another participant, however, stated that she had been able to locate "relevant and positive" materials with the "very helpful" staff at her religious college library (p. 46). These two, perhaps extreme, ends of the spectrum highlight the need for larger samples. Overall, the

women from small communities reported feeling uncomfortable or unsafe searching for information at their local public libraries.

Rothbauer's 2004 dissertation examined the role of reading in the identities of young lesbian, queer, and bisexual women. From background research and interviews with her participants, she put forth six general claims regarding libraries (pp. 68-9):

1. "Libraries are a safe place to explore alternative sexual identities."
2. "Libraries have a responsibility to provide information about alternative sexualities to all patrons."
3. "Libraries play a unique role as information resources in the initial coming-out processes of lesbians and gays."
4. "Libraries could play stronger mediating roles between individual lesbian and gay patrons and larger queer communities."
5. "Library collections of lesbian and gay literature need to be improved in terms of depth, currency, scope, and quality."
6. "Libraries need to improve access to existing collections."

She concluded, "while almost all participants saw the public library as a potential site of access to lesbian and gay literature and for information about being gay and they used it [in] their attempts to locate reading materials, all of them expressed disappointment, dissatisfaction, frustration, and failure over their searching" (p. 69).

Chapter 3. Conceptual Framework

Three key theoretical approaches are fundamental to understanding services to LGBTQ+ patrons: feminist theory (particularly lesbian feminism), queer theory, and intersectionality. In debating the relatedness of feminist and queer theory, scholars have asked questions such as, "If similar, then where do the main areas of theoretical overlap and shared interests lie? If different, then can queer theory and feminist theory be understood as two separate fields of enquiry? If so, then are these two fields of study merely distinct from one another or are they counter posed?" (Richardson, 2006, p. 24). In this chapter, I introduce each theory, explore the often-contentious relationship between feminist and queer theory, and explain how prior LIS research into LGBTQ+ services has utilized theory.

3.1 Feminist Theory

It would perhaps be more accurate to refer to this section as feminist theories, rather than feminist theory, as the latter implies a single unified theory. In actuality, there are numerous strands of feminist theory throughout time and geographical space. For simplicity's sake, I focus largely on Western feminist theory, particularly in the United States. It is necessary to note that while different waves and sub-theories can be identified, there are no concrete borders separating x-feminist theory from y-feminist theory.

We can begin to understand feminist theory(s) by first defining feminism. While scholars have identified proto-feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Sojourner Truth, and Virginia Woolf, "feminism" as understood today was not defined until the late 19th century. In a 1986 review of *A Feminist Dictionary* by Cheris Kramarae, Paula A. Treichler, and Ann Russo, Marie Shear suggested the following definition of feminism: "feminism: The radical notion that women are people" (p. 6). In *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, bell hooks reiterates and

expands upon what she first described in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*: "Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression," (2000, p. xii). In the United States, there has been a tendency to view feminism and feminist theory as occurring in three or four "waves". The first wave, which represented the beginning of the American feminist movement, is often considered to span from the first women's rights convention, the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 through to 1920, when the 19th Amendment was ratified. First wave feminism is associated with figures such as Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The major focus during this time was women's suffrage. Second wave feminism is associated with the 1960s to the 1990s, with a focus on workplace equality and reproductive rights, and figures such as Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan. The 1990s saw a shift into third-wave feminism that focused on moving away from the "perceived privileging of straight white women" previously seen (cline, n.d.). Figures such as bell hooks and Audre Lorde played key roles in third-wave feminism. There is debate over whether third-wave feminism is ongoing or if American feminism has moved into a fourth wave.

At its core, feminist theory can be said to examine the social and structural factors contributing to sexism, sexual exploitation, and oppression. Or, as the Feminist Theory Archive at Brown University uses as their collection guide, "Feminist theory is discourse that attempts to explain the systemic causes and effects of inequality among the sexes including how factors such as race, class, and sexuality affect these inequalities…Key areas of focus within feminist theory include discrimination and exclusion, objectification, power and oppression, and the social construction of identity" (Pembroke Archives, n.d.).

The advent of feminist theory is sometimes attributed to French phenomenologist Simone de Beauvior, who famously stated, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" in her 1949

book The Second Sex. She argued that there is an asymmetrical socialization of men and women, where men are socialized to be on what she called the valued side of patriarchal binaries (the One, the universal, subject, mind, culture), while women are socialized to be on the undesirable side of the binary (the Other, the particular, object, body, nature). Scholar Pelagia Goulimari argued, "all contemporary feminist theory has been influenced by Beauvior, in some respect or other" (2020, n.p.). However, Beauvoir did not necessarily consider herself a feminist, stating in an interview in 1949, "I said that I was not a feminist...by feminist I meant fighting on specifically feminine issues independently of the class struggle. I still hold the same view today" (Moi, 1986, p. 92, quoted in Rich, 2007, p. 14).

Contemporary feminism includes sub-theories such as feminist phenomenology, which considers concepts such as lived experience, embodiment, and orientation (Iris Marion Young, Miranda Fricker, Sara Ahmed); African American and Black feminists have thought about race, intersectionality, and heterogeneity (Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, Saidiya Hartman); postcolonial feminism discusses the subaltern, specificity, and agency (Assia Djebar, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty); and queer and transgender feminists think about performativity, continuous transition, and self-identification (Judith Butler, Jack Halberstam, Susan Stryker) (Goulimari, 2020).

Two feminist theories need to be discussed more in depth in order to understand the fierce debates between feminist and queer theory expanded upon in section 3.3. These are radical feminism and lesbian feminism.

Radical Feminism

Radical feminism is the strand of feminism some scholars refer to as "dominance feminism" (Showden, 2012). Furthermore, "[i]n the public imagination at large, 'women's libbers' and

feminism generally are linked most strongly with radical feminist thought and politics" (Andermahr et al., 1997, p. 222). Scholars such as Kate Millett (*Sexual Politics)*, Shulamith Firestone (*The Dialectic of Sex*), and Mary Daly (*Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*) argued against the male domination that they identified both "in the home as well as the larger social world" (Rich, 2007, p. 18). Slogans such as 'The personal is political,' 'reclaim the night,' and 'our bodies ourselves' became the mantras of radical feminism.

Two key criticisms of radical feminism are relevant to later debates. One, while early radical feminism "posed a devastating and far-reaching critique of patriarchal norms," it retained a "much deeper problem within second-wave feminism: the failure to acknowledge differences among women" (Rich, 2007, p. 23). This led to multiple fractures within feminist thought, notably Black feminists and lesbian feminists. The movements emerged from "the frustration of exclusion that black women felt by 'white' mainstream feminism [and] lesbians felt that their particular experiences were marginalized by feminism's focus on the heterosexual/patriarchal world" (Rich, 2007, p. 23).

Two, with the rise of figures such as Catharine MacKinnon, Sheila Jeffreys, and Janice Raymond in the 1990s, radical feminism became famously "anti-sex." These scholars (and others) have argued fiercely for the negative impact of pornography, prostitution, and even heterosexual sex in general, suggesting that these "are the source of gendered power imbalances" (Showden, 2012, p.10). Showden argues that the sex negative view of radical (dominance) feminism has been allowed to speak for feminist theory as a whole, suggesting "dominance feminism thus has come to wield a specific kind of power—a dominance of its own—that needs to be challenged" (p. 4). Similarly, in 2006, McLaughlin argued, "The repeated attacks on feminism—rarely acknowledged as being about a narrow version of radical feminism—helped

its fashionable criteria. Particular figures such as MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin have become the straw figures (although rarely read) of queer theory attacks on dowdy feminism" (p. 72).

Lesbian Feminism

In 1970, Betty Freidan commented "that lesbians constituted a 'lavender menace' to the nascent feminist movement" (Rich, 2007, pp. 22-3). With this alienation from the greater feminist movement, a new strand of feminist theory arose: lesbian feminism. In response to Freidan's comments, the group 'Radicalesbians' was formed, and with them, the claim that "a lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of an explosion" (Radicalesbians, 1970, p. 1). Twentieth-century lesbian feminism included not only those women who identified themselves as having a sexual or romantic attraction to women, but also "political lesbians." Political lesbianism was a practice in which "women made deliberate choices to be with women both emotionally and possibly sexually, not because they saw themselves as innately lesbian, but because they took an anti-patriarchal stance. They thus proclaimed lesbianism as a political and feminist choice" (Griffin, 2017). During this time, there was a "current of 'lesbian separatism' [that] sought to create strong boundaries around the 'Lesbian Nation' by emphasizing essential differences between lesbians and heterosexuals, whether male or female" (Epstein, 2009, p. 48). Lesbian separatists argued not only for removing themselves from heterosexuals, but also from gay men, who often dominated the gay liberation movement.

Essential to early lesbian feminism are the works of Adrienne Rich and Monique Wittig. Rich's groundbreaking 1980 essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" discussed the concepts of compulsory heterosexuality and the lesbian continuum. Compulsory heterosexuality refers to the idea that "heterosexuality is presumed as a 'sexual preference' of 'most women,' either implicitly or explicitly" (p. 633). Under this viewpoint, heterosexuality is

considered the normal or default state of existence. Rich's lesbian continuum describes the ways women can relate to other women, embracing "many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support…" (pp. 648-649) all the way through to women who are sexually and/or romantically attracted to women. She argued, "If we consider the possibility that all women…exist on a lesbian continuum, we can see ourselves as moving in and out of this continuum, whether we identify ourselves as lesbian or not" (pp. 650-651). Playing on Beauvior's earlier work, Wittig's 1981 essay "One is Not Born a Woman," famously argued "Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is not a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically" (Wittig, 2013, p. 250). Jennifer Rich clarified Wittig, stating "Wittig is not denying lesbians' biological femininity, rather she is expressing their essential independence from a category in which they—because of their life and love choices—can find no place" (2007, p. 52).

However, not all lesbian theorists have agreed with earlier radical lesbians. Calhoun (1994) argued that previous lesbian theorists "played off the feminist claim that all male-female relationships are dominance relationships. They argued either that the lesbian is *the* paradigm case of patriarchal resister because she refuses to be heterosexual or that she fits on a continuum of types of patriarchal resisters…contemporary lesbian theorists are less inclined to read lesbianism as feminist resistance to male dominance" (p. 558). She worried lesbian theory is nothing more than feminist theory applied to lesbians, noting "lesbian feminists have had to assert their differences from gay men and thus their distance from both the political aims and the self-understanding of the gay movement" (p. 560). The gay rights movement, she argued, both

failed to "address the connection between lesbian oppression and women's oppression" and "tended to equate gay with gay male and failed to address the patriarchal attitudes embedded in the gay movement itself," thus "making clear the difference between lesbians and gay men meant that lesbian feminists' focus had to be on the experience of lesbians in a patriarchal culture, not on their experience as deviants in a heterosexist culture" (p. 560). Calhoun argued that "lesbianism ought not to be read solely as resistance to patriarchal male-female relationships," as well as "it does not follow…that the collapse of patriarchy will bring about the collapse of heterosexual dominance…Thus it is a mistake for feminists to assume that work to end gender subordination will have as much payoff for lesbians as it would for heterosexual women" (p. 562). In her article, Calhoun looked to "illustrate the difference between being a lesbian and being a feminist, between lesbian politics and feminist politics, and to sketch the directions that I think lesbian theory would need to go in order to make a space for fully lesbian theorizing within feminist thought" (pp. 562-563).

Calhoun took great issue with Wittig's argument that "lesbians are not women," arguing that it "claims both too much and too little for lesbians as well as reads lesbianism from a peculiarly heterosexual viewpoint" (p. 563). She argued that if Wittig equates being a woman with servitude to men, then "the heterosexual celibate, virgin, single-parent head of household, marriage resister, or the married woman who insists on an egalitarian marriage contract" would also fit the category of "not women." Additionally, she argued that while "the lesbian escapes whatever control *individual* men may exercise over their wives within marriage, she does not thereby escape control of her productive and reproductive labor either in her personal life with another woman or in her public life" (p. 564).

Calhoun made a bold claim: “Lesbianism is mistakenly read as the quintessential form of feminist revolt” (p. 573). She drew on Shane Phelan, stating “Phelan’s criticism of Adrienne Rich for marginalizing ‘real’ lesbians who resisted heterosexuality and for giving nonlesbians who resisted dependency on men pride of place on her lesbian continuum applies generally to those who equate lesbian politics with feminist politics” (p. 577). Phelan had previously argued “It becomes clear that the existence of these women [lesbians], those who have been targets of abuse for decades, is less interesting to lesbian feminists than the existence of women who never called themselves lesbians, never thought of themselves as such, and never faced the consequences of that. The sort of lesbian who laid the groundwork, built the urban subcultures, that allowed lesbians to find one another before feminism, is remembered primarily in the works of male historians. The relevant community is lesbian feminist, with the emphasis, curiously, on the feminist rather than the lesbian” (1989, p. 69). Calhoun argued that “specifically lesbian sexual and romantic attraction to women is left without any politically or conceptually interesting place to be,” suggesting prior lesbian feminists such as Janice Raymond, Charlotte Bunch, Monique Wittig, and Adrienne Rich have “marginalize[d] lesbian love in favor of a form of love between women that is more directly tied to feminist solidarity” (p. 577-8).

3.2 Queer Theory

The term ‘queer theory’ was coined by Teresa de Lauretis at a 1990 “working conference on theorizing lesbian and gay sexualities” at the University of California, Santa Cruz and later expounded in a 1991 issues of the journal *differences: A journal of feminist cultural studies.* According to de Lauretis , the context out of which queer theory arose was one simultaneously arguing against heteronormativity and struggling against the history of “white gay historiography and sociology” in which women were “added on as an afterthought, with little or no

understanding of female socio-sexual specificity" (1991, p. iv) and lesbian discourse was separated from gay or homosexual discourse. Thus queer theory "was arrived at in the effort to avoid all of these fine distinctions [lesbian, gay, 'gay and lesbian,' 'lesbian and gay'] in our discursive protocols, not to adhere to any one of these given terms, not to assume their ideological liabilities, but instead to both transgress and transcend them—or at the very least problematize them" (p. v). At the same time, critiques of lesbian and gay discourses were made by bisexual and transgender people who found "little room for identities, desires, practices and relationships that fell in between or outside of such categories [of homo/heterosexual] or challenged the premise upon which those identities were formulated (Giffney & O'Rourke, 2009, p. 22).

Despite taking off like academic wildfire, there is an inherent difficulty in trying to define queer theory. Only two years after the term was coined, Michael Warner wrote "The appeal of 'queer theory' has outstripped anyone's sense of what exactly it means" (1992, p. 19). Additionally, he describes queer theory as "a largely intuitive and half-articulate theory" (p. 19). Scholars including David Halperin, Lauren Berlant, and Warner have all warned against defining or summarizing queer theory, with the latter two arguing "because almost everything that can be called queer theory has been radically anticipatory, trying to bring a world into being, any attempt to summarize it now will be violently partial" (Berlant & Warner, 1995, p. 344).

Even books ostensibly written to introduce readers to queer theory (e.g., Annamarie Jagose's *Queer Theory: An Introduction* or Nikki Sullivan's *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*) largely refuse to offer productive definitions; J. Todd Bailey refers to these introductions as "maddening" (2018-2019, p. 80), pointing to Sullivan's assertion that "Queer Theory does not want to 'straighten up and fly right' to have the kinks ironed out of it; it is a discipline that

refuses to be disciplined..." and "…attempting to define what queer is… would be a decidedly un-queer thing to do…" (2003**,** p. v, quoted in Bailey, 2018-2019, p. 81). Furthermore, Sullivan suggested that her book "does not attempt to define what Queer Theory is, but, rather is concerned with providing an overview of what Queer Theories do…" (2003, p. vi).

Focusing on concepts such as performativity, continuous transition, and self-identification, queer theory "see[s] sexuality as a discursive social construction, fluid, plural, and continually negotiated rather than a natural, fixed, core identity" (Doyle, 2005, n.p.). Queer theorists have been highly influenced by the post-structuralist theories of scholars such as Althusser, Freud, Foucault, Lacan, and Saussure. For instance, Freud's ideas "of the unconscious further challenges the notion that subjectivity is stable and coherent" while Lacan's work on subjectivity supports the argument that "Identity…is an effect of identification with and against others: being ongoing, and always incomplete, it is a process rather than a property" (Jagose, 1996, p. 79).

LIS scholar Emily Drabinski (discussed further in chapter 3.5) pointed to scholars such as David Halperin and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work on the constituting of gay and lesbian identities and argued queer theory "sees these identities as shifting and contextual" as opposed to "stable and fixed." Queer theory "is interested in how those [gender and sexual] identities come discursively and socially into being and the kind of work they do in the world," while lesbian/gay studies "take gender and sexual identities as its object of study" (p. 96). The major distinction, she argued, is "Lesbian and gay studies is concerned with what homosexuality is. Queer theory is concerned with what homosexuality does" (p. 96).[11]

[11] It is worthwhile to note the similarity between Drabinski's statement here and Sullivan's earlier framing of her book. In both instances, the reader walks away with the understanding that there is something about doing rather than being inherent in queer theory.

As mentioned, queer theory quickly became the theory du jour of academic circles. This popularity led many foundational queer theorists to worry over the future of queer theory. Jagose asked "Does queer become defunct the moment it is an intelligible and widely disseminated term?" (1996, p. 127). Halperin meanwhile speculated "queer politics may, by now, have outlived its political usefulness" (1995, p. 112). In fact, Teresa de Lauretis herself "abandoned it [queer theory] barely three years later, on the grounds that it had been taken over by those mainstream forces and institutions it was coined to resist" (Jagose, 1996, p. 127). Of her 1994 work *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*, de Lauretis explained "As for 'queer theory', my insistent specification *lesbian* may well be taken as a taking of distance from what, since I proposed it…has very quickly become a conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry" (1994, p. 297). Despite these concerns, queer theory has continued to proliferate within academia. As we will explore, however, this is not without contentions.

3.3 Debates Between Feminist and Queer Theories

Debates over the merits and pitfalls, as well as similarities and differences, of queer and feminist theory have been fierce on both sides. At times, this has led to outright "antagonism" between feminist and queer theorists (McLaughlin, 2006, p. 59). McLaughlin suggested queer scholars such as Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin, Eve Sedgwick, and Carol Vance "argue that feminists ignore alternative forms of identity and pleasure in favour of a concentration on male oppression and female victimization," while feminist scholars such as Elizabeth Glick, Sheila Jeffreys, and Martha Nussbaum "accuse these same queer theorists of being elitists who are unwilling to concern themselves with what happens outside the academy, the novel or the film" and "see the queer perspective as a prime example of the turn in theory away from the reality of the material world and towards a concern with cultural activities and career success" (p. 59). She noted that

while Butler argued for new feminist perspectives, Rubin and Sedgwick at times seemed to argue for moving beyond feminist theory entirely—or at the very least, this is how their work has been interpreted and built upon by others. This is later echoed by Showden, who explains Butler, Rubin, and Sedgwick's turns from feminism to queer. She stated, "Gayle Rubin suggested as early as 1984 that while feminism is an appropriate theoretical lens for analysing gender, it may not be sufficient for understanding questions of sex" (2012, p. 7). She further argued that Rubin was not advocating for a complete split from feminist theory but was instead suggesting an expansion of the current partial gender frame. However, "as this view was taken up, it developed into a methodological distinction allocating sexuality to queer studies and gender to feminism" (p. 7). Similarly, she stated Butler "argued that rather than split from feminism, queer projects out to work within feminism" and, in fact, when Butler and other poststructuralist feminists have worked to theorize gender without heterosexuality, "they often get read as really queer theory" (p. 7). There is less room for compatibility between feminist and queer theory in Showden's reading of Sedgwick; she stated, "As…argued in *Epistemology of the Closet*, because feminism's raison d'être is to analyse and critique the gender division between men and women—because there must be men and there must be women for feminism to be cognizable—feminism is, logically, heterosexual and heterosexist" (p. 7). It goes without saying that many lesbian feminists would take issue with Sedgwick's argument.

An important criticism shared by many scholars, both feminist theorists as well as some queer theorists, is a lack of proper genealogical acknowledgement within queer theory. In the introduction to *Intersections Between Feminist and Queer Theory* (2006), the editors discussed their motivations for the book, stating:

> …despite the existence of numerous books on feminist theory and, increasingly, on queer, we are mindful of the fact that, at present, there are few texts that bring the two together in a manner that explores the interconnections, as well as the contestations, between them…We consider the need for a text that does this all the more important given that queer theory is often written about as though it has no history or antecedents. (pp. 5-6)

Queer theory is often "positioned as progressive relative to feminism," while ignoring the influence of feminist scholars such as Monique Wittig and Adrienne Rich (Richardson, 2006, p. 29). Garber (2006) recalls an incident in which she assigned Rich's 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' to her lesbian literature seminar. Afterward, she learned from a transfer student that, in a previous feminist theory class the student took, "the essay had been introduced derisively; well reasoned critiques and queer dismissals of Rich and lesbian feminism had been rolled into a sort of smear campaign before the students ever read the essay" (p. 88). Some scholars are working to reclaim the feminist roots of queer theory. For example, feminist and queer scholar Clare Hemmings stated, "In my own work…I've been revisiting the separation between feminist and queer theorizing by intervening in citations of Butler that cite Foucault as her antecedent, inserting Wittig instead in order to both re-gender 'queer theory' and to raise the question of feminist traces in queer studies again" (2018, p. 392).

One of the key debates between feminist and queer theorists is the question of how to think about lesbians. More precisely, whether people should be thought of in relation to their gender (feminist theory) or sexuality (queer theory). Queer theorists disagreed with feminists who combined lesbians with straight women, as opposed to gay men. Thus, while some have viewed queer theory as "an antidote to the perceived limitations of lesbian feminism," others have worried about "the possible erosion of lesbians in queer theory" (Jagose, 1996, p.

116). Jagose noted "'Lesbian' itself began to circulate widely only when a nascent lesbian feminism became disillusioned with masculinist bias in the priorities of both the homophile and subsequently gay liberations movements. So, for many lesbian feminists, the rise of queer and its claims to gender non-specificity already evoke an unwelcome sense of *déjà vu*" (p. 116). However, while many scholars have drawn firm lines in the sand between feminist and queer theory, others have argued for a blurring of those lines. Richardson suggested "We can…think of the relationship between feminism and queer theory as a complex dynamic of oppositions, intersections and contestations. Postmodern feminist theories of gender and sexuality have been taken up by queer theory in ways that blur the boundary between feminist/queer writers" (2006, p. 21). In an interview, Hemmings was asked if she considered her work to be feminist or queer, as distinguished by Judith Butler in the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, or if she rejected Butler's distinction. Her response was to reject "any absolute distinction between feminist and queer theories," stating, "The common story is that feminist thinking comes first, but is then displaced by queer theory. It's a distinction that produces a hierarchy of value too, where feminist and queer theories are too easily pitted against one another…" (2018, p. 392). Instead, she suggested following the lead of scholars like Robyn Wiegman and using the term 'queer feminist theory.' In her work on prostitution, Showden criticized both queer theory and radical feminism, stating "As Maxine Eichner (2009) argues, while dominance [radical] feminism is too totalizing and inattentive to the ruptures in the gender hierarchy, queer theory is too quick to assume that putting a positive spin on sex acts makes them resistant" (2012, p. 8). Like Hemmings, she suggests a turn to queer feminism, stating "…this deep incommensurability is not between feminism and queer theory, it is between one version of feminism and queer theory. There are ways to reconcile feminist critiques of subordination and feminist desires to generate a

more open habitus of sexuality for women with queer theory's reliance on subversion, play, and resistance" (p. 19).

3.4 Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a theory and framework that has become commonly used across disciplines. While there are debates over the precise definition of intersectionality, it is generally agreed that it can be said to refer to "the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (Collins, 2015, p. 2). Intersectionality as a named theory was first introduced in 1989 by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, a Black feminist legal scholar who was also foundational in critical race theory. Crenshaw used intersectionality as a metaphor for understanding the experiences of Black women and antidiscrimination law in the United States, stating:

> Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (p. 149)

However, while Crenshaw may have coined the term intersectionality, the ideas behind it were not new. Indeed, scholars have urged "it is important to recognize the roots of intersectionality in the political movement of Black women, Chicana and Latina women, and other women of color—most of them lesbian identified" (Carastathis, 2014). This includes voices from the Combahee River Collective, Angela Davis, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Kathy

Davis, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Barbara Smith. Patricia Hill Collins later wrote about intersectionality, social phenomena (2003), and power relations (2015).

In the years since its introduction, intersectionality has taken off in multiple academic disciplines as a way to examine intersections of different identities. It "has been strongly associated with women's studies, gender studies, cultural studies, media studies…as well within the humanities, history, and similar disciplines…," with some use in the social sciences, as well (Collins, 2015, p. 6). The widespread use of the term intersectionality has led to much criticism.

One of the key concerns around the proliferation of intersectionality is that it "obscure[s] its origins in Black feminist thought" (Carastathis, 2014, p. 304), particularly when being claimed by disciplines that are traditionally and continue to be white dominated fields, such as women's or gender studies and feminist theory. This has been referred to as "the whitening of intersectionality," which is "achieved in part by excluding…or overlooking the contributions of those who have multiple minority identities and are marginalized social actors—women of color and queers of color" (Bilge, 2013, p. 412). Bilge has argued strongly against "ornamental intersectionality," stating "it would be misleading to consider ornamental intersectionality as benign, for it is part and parcel of the neutralization, even active disarticulation, of radical politics of social justice" (p. 408).

Bilge especially argued "careful intersectional thinking must always account for different meanings, purposes, and audiences. Intersectionality does not create a shopping list of categories that can be deployed to shut down discussion of specific oppressions ('yes, race is important, but what about…?')" (2013, p. 420). She pointed to Sara Ahmed's work, stating: "Without suggesting that these 'what about gender/sexuality/class?' questions are not legitimate, [Ahmed]

rightly points out that ‘given how hard it is to attend to race and racism, these questions can be used as a way of redirecting attention. In other words, when hearing about race and racism is too difficult, intersectionality can be deployed as a defense against hearing’” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 195 qtd. in Bilge, 2013, p. 420).

Given this intense criticism, it would be a mistake not to address the largely ignored history of international intersectional Jewish feminism. This history dates to the early twentieth century (at least). Elizabeth Loentz (2023) proposed that Bertha Pappenheim was a proto-intersectional thinker, stating:

She realized over a century ago that Jewish women had different concerns and a different experience of antisemitism than Jewish men. Recognizing the marginalization of Jewish women within both the male-dominated Jewish community and the German feminist movement, Pappenheim founded a German-Jewish feminist movement that was distinct from yet integrated into the German feminist movement.

Jewish women have been largely excluded from the intersectional discussion. German-Jewish feminists Ina Holev and Miriam Yosef founded an educational initiative called “Jewish & Intersectional,” reporting “they have felt excluded from intersectional feminist groups and that antisemitism is often tolerated or even reproduced in these settings” (Loentz, 2023, p. 24). Scholars such as Dina Pinsky and Marla Brettschneider have both noted that “Jews have been largely left out of the conversation about intersectionality in women’s studies. This conversation has emphasized the interaction between gender, class, and race, yet it has not examined the role of religious identities” (Pinksy, 2010, p. 97) and “there is almost no mention, let alone serious analysis, of this dynamic Jewish feminist and queer subfield in intersectionality studies to date” (Brettschneider, 2016, p. 6).

This is not to say that Pappenheim was the "creator" of intersectionality, nor is it to discount criticism over potential misuses of intersectionality. Loentz herself stated "I resist calling Pappenheim a 'vanguard' of intersectional feminism, in part because I am aware of the problem of co-opting a late-twentieth-century theoretical model developed by Black feminists in the specifically American context to frame the experience and activism of white Jewish women of Pappenheim's time and place" (2023, p. 25). However, it *does* demonstrate the idea of studying how different identities and oppressive forces intersect in a person's life has a much earlier history than is commonly acknowledged. It may be advisable to differentiate between Intersectionality and intersectional analysis as a way to acknowledge both the context Crenshaw wrote about (capital I Intersectionality) and a deeper history of feminist thought (intersectional analysis).

3.5 Theory Use in ILS Research

The literature on library services to LGBTQ+ patrons is largely practice based, with little emphasis on theory. However, some LIS authors draw on queer theory, feminist theory, and intersectionality.

Drabinski used queer theory to problematize subject headings in her 2013 article "Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction." She stated, "Queer theory provides a useful theoretical frame for rethinking the stable, fixed categories and systems of naming that categorize library knowledge organization schemes and strategies for helping users navigate them" (p. 96). Drabinski also emphasized the differences between queer theory and lesbian/gay studies. One key difference is the recuperative nature of lesbian/gay studies. Drabinski argued against a recuperative approach, stating,

> Lesbian and gay studies grew out of the recognition that those identities were largely absent from the historical record. The goal was recuperative, and scholars like John Boswell and Lillian Faderman sought to locate lesbians and gays in history, where they had previously been missing. Queer theory, however, argued that this recuperative approach was dangerous. It froze identities in time and universalized them, erasing the real differences that accompany same-sex sexuality on the scales of time and place. (p. 96)

Drabinski further pointed to scholars such as David Halperin and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work on the constituting of gay and lesbian identities and argued that queer theory "sees these identities as shifting and contextual" as opposed to "stable and fixed." Queer theory "is interested in how those [gender and sexual] identities come discursively and socially into being and the kind of work they do in the world," while lesbian/gay studies "take gender and sexual identities as its object of study" (p. 96). The major distinction, she argued, is "Lesbian and gay studies is concerned with what homosexuality is. Queer theory is concerned with what homosexuality does" (p. 96).

This distinction is useful in building Drabinski's main argument, which is centered around the revision of classification and cataloging. There has been extensive debate surrounding Library of Congress Subject Headings with regards to multiple minority groups, including LGBTQ+ identities (Bates & Rowley, 2011; Edge, 2019; Howard & Knowlton, 2018; Lo, 2019; Roberto, 2011). While most authors tend to suggest alternative subject headings or classification systems, Drabinski argued for a queer perspective on classification that recognizes categories as fluid and thus unable to ever be "fixed"—both in the sense of fixed as unmoving and fixed as in

corrected. Instead, she suggested the responsibility for correcting problems with subject indexing may fall on public services librarians rather than catalogers, stating,

> These traces [of historicity and ideology that mar the classification and cataloging project] also represent moments when the burden of undoing the hegemony of library classification and cataloging shifts from the back office to the reference desk and classroom, where public service librarians can intervene and emphasize the discursivity of classification and cataloging by engaging in critical reflection with users about what they do and do not see in the library catalog. (p. 109)

However, while this interpretation and deployment of queer theory is useful for Drabinski's argument, this is not the only nor indeed the most helpful way queer theory has been used in this body of literature. Perhaps the most fundamental usage of queer (and feminist) theory and its effect on our understanding of services to LGBTQ+ patrons comes from Kitzie et al.'s 2022 work, "How Visibility, Hypervisibility, and Invisibility Shape Library Staff and Drag Performer Perceptions of and Experiences with Drag Storytimes in Public Libraries."

In this article, Kitzie et al. drew on queer theory scholars Sara Ahmed and Susan Stryker to explain why discrimination may occur in libraries, with the authors stating:

> Because queerness and queer people's genders and/or sexualities are inherently politicized due to institutionalized cis/heteronormativity, queer people may be erased and/or discriminated against. Cis/heteronormativity refers to worldviews that privilege cisgender and heterosexual standpoints; such worldviews result in institutionalized discourses that position cisgender and heterosexual people as "normal" or the default. (p. 216)

They also discussed the experiences of drag queens using the work of Jack Halberstam. They shared a story of a performer whose photo was circulated on a Facebook community group and comments were made suggesting he was a monster preying on children, stating: "Liam's use of monstrosity to signify embodied difference or otherness has an extensive history within queer and feminist contexts (Halberstam, 1995)" (Kitzie et al., 2022, p. 229). Finally, they discuss performativity in the context of Judith Butler and José Esteban Muñoz, stating: "Drag specifically hinges on satirizing, or poking fun, at these social categories to demonstrate their instabilities, offering new insights into how what some may think of as essential and fixed—such as gender—is, in actuality, fluid and unstable" (p. 232).

Bates and Rowley drew on feminist theories of identity in their analysis of socio-cultural exclusion in subject representation in public library online catalogs and in their critique of dominant models of inclusion. They suggested Butler's argument that "the 'premature' construction of identities as coherent, unitary categories can work to problematically erase the 'discursively constituted' nature of identity, the diversity of individuals that may find themselves placed within the same category" (2011, p. 433) is "central" to understanding inclusivity in cataloging. They also cited feminist library scholar Hope Olson (2007), who has argued for a feminist construction of subjects, as opposed to the traditional (masculine) logic model of classification.

The consequences of cis/heteronormativity can be found throughout the literature on LGBTQ+ library services, from the absence and controversy of programming (Barriage et al., 2021; Naidoo, 2013; Robinson, 2016) to a lack of available materials (Betts-Green, 2020; Hughes-Hassell et al., 2013; Movius, 2018) to discomfort at the reference desk (Curry, 2005; Drake & Bielefield, 2017; Mehra & Braquet, 2011). This provides a counterpoint to Drabinski's

suggestion that correcting problems can come from public services librarians. Clearly, while this might be possible, it is not happening on a large scale.

However, Kitzie et al. (2022) also pointed out "cis/heteronormative standpoints and queer standpoints do not form a binary in which libraries either fully include queer people or completely exclude them. Instead, libraries may perform certain aspects of queer inclusivity…while simultaneously excluding queer people in other areas" (p. 216). Collections and book displays are two areas they point to as places libraries may include queer content, while programming and restroom accessibility are two areas of exclusion.

Similarly to other fields, LIS research, including research into LGBTQ+ issues, has been drawn toward the use of intersectionality. Hicks and Kerrigan (2020) and Proctor (2020) serve as two examples of LIS research into LGBTQ+ issues in libraries that engage with intersectionality.

Hicks and Kerrigan drew heavily on research into LGBT fiction from two library vendors, which found that even within a self-publishing e-book platform, where one might expect greater freedom, LGBT content was "predominantly focused on the gay, white, adult, male experience (Moulaison-Sandy et al., 2017)," leading Hicks and Kerrigan to suggest that "if library professionals are not creating purposeful LGBTQ+ collection development strategies, they run the risk of acquiring only the most easily available…" (2020, p. 1031). Given this, their study "aims to examine whether the Irish public libraries catalogue follows international trends and has materials that are overwhelmingly representative of the gay, adult male experience" (p. 1029). It is worth noting that while the work they drew on found that LGBT books favor the gay, *white*, adult, male experience, Hicks and Kerrigan repeatedly hypothesize that the books will favor the gay, adult, male experience.

It is possible the authors chose to include little about race due to their difficulty discerning race in the catalogue. They state that the catalogue of physical books lacked adequate information to categorize them by race. However, they were able to use e-book catalogue book covers to determine a racial category for 66% of titles, of which 52% were white. They said: "Within the catalogue, the adult, gay, male experience is the predominant representational focus, followed by gay, male youths. And…when it comes to the eBook catalogue the white experience is predominant…" (p. 1036).

It is worth reiterating that this research took place in Ireland, and the racial demographics of the books are actually more diverse than the estimated racial demographics of Ireland. Estimates from 2022 state that 87.1% of the population identified as White, while 3.3% identified as Asian, 1.5% as Black, 2% as Other, and 2.6% Unspecified ("Ireland," 2024).

Proctor's (2020) article assessed the coverage of LGBTQ+ content across Penn State University Libraries (PSUL). The author stated "LGBTQ-related materials within a collection should reflect the intersectionality inherent in LGBTQ studies, queer theory, and transgender studies; for example, works from and about queer and trans people of color (QTPOC) should be represented" (p. 224). In the article's literature review, she drew on Crenshaw (1991, p. 1242), quoting:

> The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intra group differences. In the context of violence against women, this elision of difference in problematic, fundamentally because the violence that many experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class.

Proctor goes on to say that "academic library collections are not organized in ways that document the intersectionality of the content collected—a lived experience based on multiple identities cannot be easily captured or documented with Library of Congress (LoC) subject headings or call numbers" (p. 226). Perhaps due to this difficulty in identifying intersectionality in traditional library organizational systems, Proctor does not focus her analysis on intersectional material. Instead, she used two methods of collection analysis: peer comparison and list checking. For peer comparison, she searched library holdings from the 2016 top-ten ARL ranked institutions (which included PSU) for seven subject headings: *Gay, Gay Men, Transgender, Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer,* and *Gender Nonconformity*. For the list checking, she checked PSUL holdings against two award winning book lists: Lambda Literary Awards and Stonewall Book Awards.

Despite her earlier focus on the intersectionality of LGBTQ books, the analysis itself contains no trace of intersectionality. She did acknowledge this fact, stating: "[T]his analysis focused on LGBTQ content broadly with the intention of casting a wide net as a starting point for more targeted analyses in the future" (p. 224). In the conclusion, she also suggested future studies could include "targeted analyses focusing on intersectionality" (p. 233). Proctor certainly appears to understand intersectionality in a way that Bilge and similar critics would approve of. While she did not get the chance to use it in her analysis, it is clearly a key part of the research's background.

These two articles demonstrate two ways intersectionality has been discussed in LIS research. Crenshaw may have originally been talking about race and gender (particularly Black women), but the metaphor of an intersection is apt for other identities as well. It is understandable that it would be a desirable framework in multiple fields and used to describe

other intersections of identity. Furthermore, as Loentz (2023) demonstrated, there is a history of intersectional thought that considered identities besides race, and it is undoubtably worthwhile to study other intersections of identity and oppression. Without a concise, well-defined alternative to intersectionality, scholars and academics are going to continue to engage with intersectionality regardless of whether they are focusing on race, potentially to the criticism of certain scholars. It is with these histories in mind that LIS researchers, particularly those researching LGBTQ+ issues, must decide if and how they are going to verbalize analyses of the intersections of oppression that exist for LGBTQ+ communities.

Chapter 4. Methodology

In this chapter, I begin by discussing the theoretical framework I am working within. I then discuss my mixed-methods approach to data collection (survey and interviews) and data analysis (content analysis and thematic analysis).

4.1 Theoretical Framework

In their 2019 collection, *Lesbian Feminisms: Essays Opposing Global Heteropatriarchies*, editors Banerjea et al. opened with the following remarks:

> *Lesbian feminisms* reflects our collective conviction that gender and sexualities matter to each other, and that their intersection cannot be overlooked in contemporary nor historical contexts. This collection is based on the premise that lesbian feminism enables an investigation of the heteropatriarchies that continue to define everyday lives. We want to emphasize the plurality of and differences around lesbian feminisms, pointing to the importance of locality in shaping discourse, experiences and struggles with regard to the liveabilities of women with 'non-heterosexual' expressions, practices and identities. (p. 1)

Furthermore, the editors stated, "It is important from the onset to note that significant disagreements continue to manifest…between some of those who might call themselves lesbian feminists *and* trans people, activists and allies. [We] take the position that lesbian feminism can be trans inclusive. We, and others, refuse to cede lesbian feminisms to those who are trans-exclusionary" (2019, p. 2).

We can consider this, perhaps, as a lesbian feminism 2.0, a theory that draws on both feminist and queer theory. The difference in outlook regarding identity politics is one place where my research falls firmly in the traditionally feminist theory stance, rather than queer theory. The belief that one's gender identity and sexual identity influence how one experiences

the world forms the backbone of this research. That is to say, someone with the dual identity of being a woman who is attracted to women has a profoundly different experience than either heterosexual women or men of any sexual orientation.

Ella Ben Hagai and Nicole Seymour highlighted the ongoing importance of lesbian identity even as there has been a move toward queerness, particularly in the United States, in their introduction to an issue of *Journal of Lesbian Studies* focusing on the question "Is lesbian identity obsolete?" In fact, the issue turned into a triple issue due to the number of submissions received. Of the articles included, they stated, "They show that attacks and stigma against lesbians are ongoing, but that the nature of these attacks shifts and morphs across space and time. Despite attacks on lesbian identity, lesbian identity continues to be personally important to many women" (2021, p. 2). I share Ben Hagai and Seymour's belief that lesbian identity continues to be important, and would argue that efforts to dismiss the importance of lesbian identity are rooted in misogyny and a desire to erase women's identities.

This research has no desire to police anyone's identity. In discussing the difficulties of determining who "counts" as a lesbian in research, Kath Weston stated, "[a researcher] might qualify women for her study based on number of previous sexual encounters with another woman, involvement in a relationship with another woman, self-identification as a lesbian, self-identification as a lesbian at some point in the past, having come out as a lesbian to one's closest friend, or any number of other possible criteria…" (2009, p. 140). She noted the problematic nature of defining lesbians based on sexual encounters or relationships, and stated, "If a person calls herself a lesbian, then she is one, for the purposes of the study, regardless of what she has or has not done by any behavioral measure" (p. 141). Hagai and Seymour argued, "Different configurations of lesbian identity that include trans, cis, nonbinary, bisexual, and asexual lesbians

are included under the lesbian tent. A clear insight…is that in a world in which gender and sexual categories increasingly proliferate, the strength of lesbian identity is that it is nonessentialist" (2021, p. 2).

It is with this statement in mind that I defined the target population for this study. Participation is based on self-identification, and there is no researcher-imposed litmus test to determine if a participant is "woman enough" or "lesbian/bisexual/queer enough." If participants considered themselves to be women* who are attracted to women*, their opinions were welcome.[12] Throughout this work, I refer to participants as LBQ (lesbian, bisexual, queer) women; however, as will be seen, participants use a wide variety of preferred terms to self-define.

4.2 Data Collection

Data collection took place in three main phases between May 2025 and December 2025. The first phase involved interviews with librarians and information users. The second and third phase occurred concurrently and included survey collection and interviews with interested survey participants. There was no compensation for completing the survey or interview.

4.2.1 Survey

The development of the survey instrument was greatly inspired by Whitt's 1993 study; unfortunately, a copy of the survey was not included in the published article, and tracking down a copy was not possible. Instead, I designed the survey instrument based on several factors,

[12] "Woman" is defined broadly. As stated on recruitment materials, "If you consider yourself to be a woman (cisgender, transgender, other) who is attracted to women (cisgender, transgender, other; exclusively or not), we want to include you."

including Whitt's results, the survey and interview schedule appended in Schaller's 2011 study, and the survey appended in Hays' 2020 survey.

The survey consisted of 25 questions in six categories. The first section obtained informed consent, the second section was background questions (including gender identity and sexual orientation), the third section was information needs, the fourth section was library usage, the fifth section was demographics, and the final section asked participants if they were interested in an interview. Participants who selected yes to being interested in an interview were given an outside link to sign up, maintaining survey anonymity. For the full survey, see Appendix A. The survey was administered through Qualtrics. Survey analysis and visualization were done using SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

Per the informed consent statement, participants were able to skip any questions causing discomfort. Partial surveys were included for analysis, provided they included answers to gender identity, sexual orientation, and at least part of the sections on information needs or library usage. Surveys in which participants *only* answered background questions were removed from analysis.

Participant Requirements and Recruitment

Survey participants were required to meet the following criteria:

1. Must be 18 years or older.
2. Must identify as a woman.
3. Must identify as being attracted to women.

Participants were recruited via a combination of methods, including convenience and snowball sampling. Flyers were distributed around the Indiana University Bloomington campus, as well as around Bloomington on community bulletin boards. Digital flyers were sent to relevant community listservs in Indiana. Flyers were also shared directly with members of the

LGBTQ+ community known to me, and participants were encouraged to share the survey with people they knew, creating a snowball effect.

Prior to the start of data collection, I consulted with the Center for Survey Research (CSR) at Indiana University to determine an ideal sample size. Given the exploratory nature of the research, it was determined that 100-200 survey participants would be an appropriate, sufficient, and realistic goal. (For example, Daniel (2012) suggested a sample size of 20 to 150 participants for exploratory research, pilot studies, and pre-tests.) A sample of this size allows for descriptive statistics that would highlight potentially significant areas for further study.

The survey was open for four months, with 179 surveys collected between August 20, 2025, and December 23, 2025. After over two weeks without new responses, the survey was closed in January 2026. Of the surveys collected, 19 were determined to be invalid[13] for analysis. This left a total of 160 surveys included for analysis. However, since participants were able to skip questions, not every question had 160 responses. Questions with fewer than 160 responses are noted, and analysis was performed based on the number of responses for that question.

Participant Demographics

The majority of participants were cisgender women (n=126; 79%), followed by transgender women (n=14; 9%). The remaining participants were non-binary (n=12; 9%) or "other" (n=8; 5%). Figures 2 and 3 show the breakdown of participants' gender identity and sexual orientation. The participants who selected "other" wrote in: gender queer; agender; genderfluid; non-binary woman; demi girl, assigned female at birth; gender non-conforming; and woman who is transgender.

[13] This included surveys that weren't answered past the background section, a cisgender man, a heterosexual woman, and several that contained no responses past informed consent.

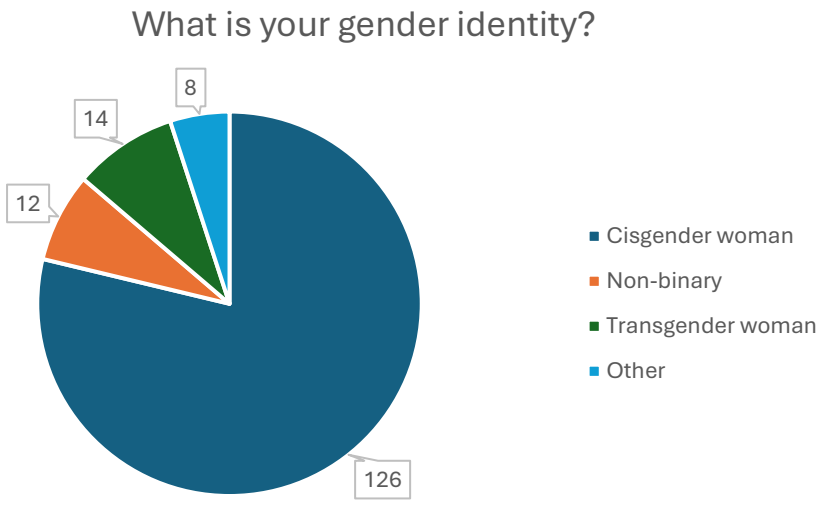

Figure 1 The gender identity of survey participants.

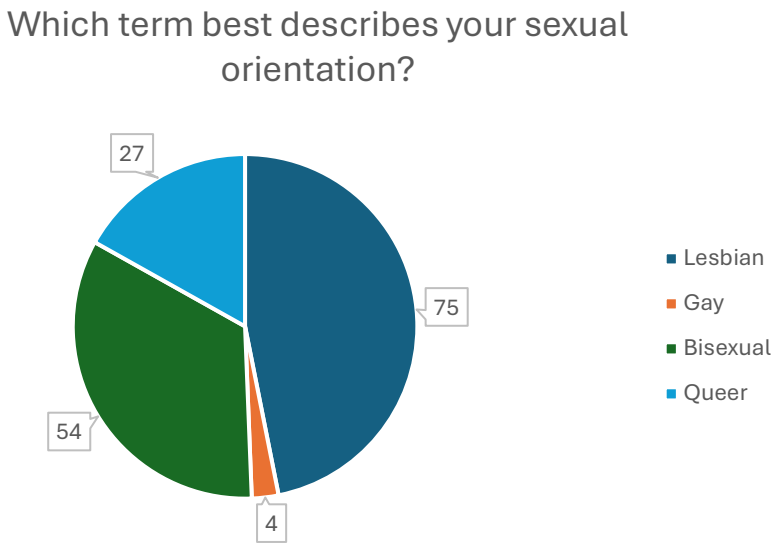

Figure 2 The sexual orientation of survey participants.

Participants were asked to select which described them best between lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. Nearly half (*n*=75; 47%) selected lesbian,[14] followed by bisexual (*n*=54;

[14] One participant did not answer question 3 (which term best describes your sexual orientation?) but wrote in "lesbian" to question four (what term do you prefer to use to self-describe?). For purposes of analysis, this response has been included with the lesbian data.

34%), queer (*n*=27; 17%), and finally gay (*n*=4; 3%). Participants were also given the option to share how they self-described their sexual orientation. A total of 60 unique configurations of terms and phrases were written in by 134 participants (see Table 1). Some participants reiterated the response they had given to the previous question (e.g., 29 answered "lesbian" and 13 answered "queer") or gave a more specific answer (e.g., "femme lesbian" or "bisexual with a preference for women"), while many others used multiple terms (e.g., "gay woman or lesbian," "bisexual/sapphic/queer," "lesbian or wlw"). Several participants noted that they changed what term they used based on the context. Thirteen people wrote in "pan" or "pansexual," which makes it the most written in response that had not been included in the previous question.

?	Gay (*n=7)*[15]	Lesbian/gay	Queer or lesbian
Aromantic, Asexual, Lesbian, Stone Butch, Gender Fluid Woman	Genderqueer lesbian	Lesbian/sapphic	Queer woman
Asexual	Gay woman or lesbian	Masc/butch	Queer, although I often use lesbian
Bi (*n=2)*	Genderqueer and sapphic	No label	Queer, gay, or lesbian
Bi, or I avoid self-describing because I have a partner	Genuine	Nonbinary and queer	Queer/bisexual
Bisexual (*n=14)*	I am a homo-romantic asexual	Nonlinear[16] trans woman	Queer/lesbian
Bisexual is fine	I dislike labeling myself. I often say "attraction to girls" or something like that	Pan	Raging bisexual and demi-aroace
Bisexual with preference for women	Im a genderqueer/nonbinary lesbian	Panromantic asexual	She/her (*n=2)*
Bisexual woman	Kind	Pansexual (*n=8*)	Thick and feisty

[15] It is unclear why four participants selected "gay" as the term that best described their sexual orientation, but seven participants wrote in "gay" as their preferred term to self-describe. It is possible they felt a different term was more accurate, but they prefer gay.

[16] I have never heard this term used to describe sexual orientation or gender identity. Possibly meant to say nonbinary.

Bisexual, or more generally unlabeled	Lesbian (*n=29)*	Pansexual, nonbinary	Trans lesbian
Bisexual/sapphic/ queer	Lesbian or dyke	Queer (*n=13*)	Transbian
Demiromantic Bisexual	Lesbian or queer	Pansexual/queer	Unlabeled
Dyke	Lesbian or wlw	Polysexual or pansexual	Woman *(n=3)*
Female	Lesbian/queer (n=2)	Queer and/or lesbian depending on context	Woman/lesbian
Femme lesbian	Lesbian woman (*n=2)*	Queer or bisexual	Woman, she/her, lesbian

Table 1 Exact terms participants used to self-identify. Number of instances noted when more than one.

Participants were asked how long they had identified with their sexual orientation. Over half (*n=90*, 56%) responded more than five years, followed by between one and four years (*n=64*, 40%) and less than one year (*n=6*, 4%). The majority of participants reported being out half the time or more, with 36% (*n=58)* saying they were always out, 39% (*n=62)* saying they were out most of the time, and 13% (*n=21*) saying about half of the time. The remaining participants reported being out sometimes (*n=17*, 11%) or never (*n=2*, 1%). Finally, participants were asked how long they had been out. The most frequent responses were between one and five years (*n=72*, 45%) and more than five years (*n=69*, 43%). Nine participants (6%) said they had been out less than a year, and 10 (6%) selected "not applicable."

At the end of the survey, demographics were collected. A total of 135 participants responded to a question about race/ethnicity; however, participants were able to select multiple options (see figure 4).[17] Approximately 63% *(n=101*) selected only white, and 14% *(n=19)* did not select white.

[17] *Asian includes Asian American; South Asian; Asian, Indian; Chinese; and East Asian.
**Other includes American Indian or Alaska Native; Middle Eastern or North African; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; Multiracial (unspecified); Indo-Caribbean; Latina (Brazilian); and Caribbean-Asian.

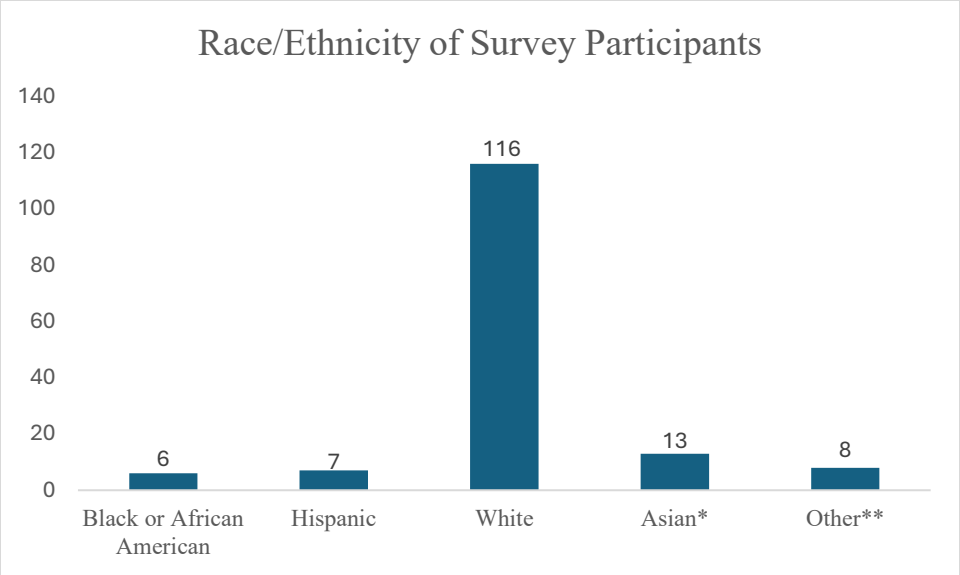

Figure 4 The race or ethnicity of participants. Participants could select multiple options.

Unsurprisingly, since one of the major recruitment sites was a university, participants tended to be on the younger end of the age spectrum, as shown in figure 5. The largest age demographic was 18-24 (*n=90*, 56%), followed by 25-34 (*n=24,* 15%). The smallest age demographic was 55+ *(n*=4, 2%), followed by 45-54 *(n*=7, 4%). However, 25 people did not give their age group (16%). Given the smaller number of participants in the 45-54 and 55+ categories, it made sense to collapse these into one category for analysis.

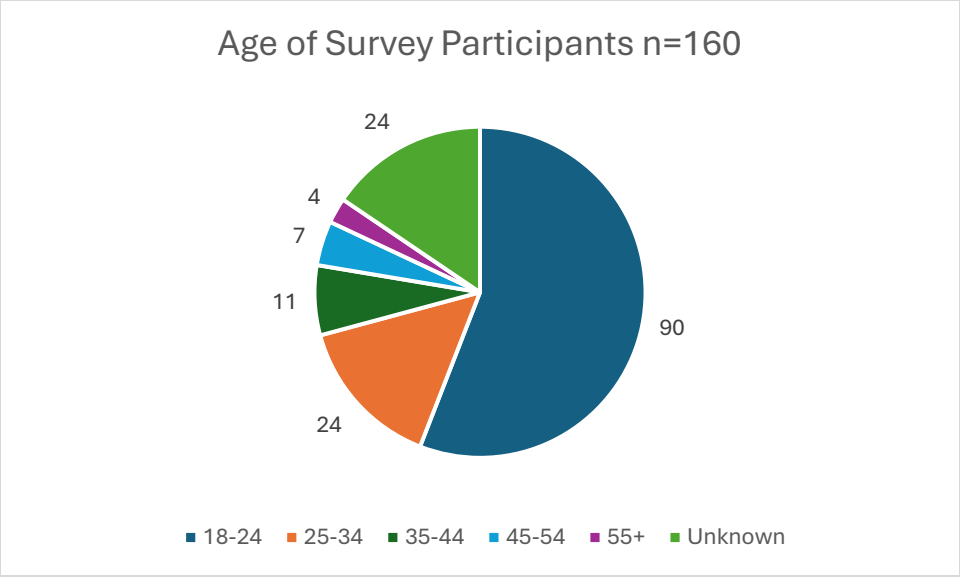

Figure 5 The age of survey participants.

Table 2 shows the breakdown of age category by sexual orientation. Overall, there was more variation in sexual orientation among the younger age categories than the older age categories. For instance, 40% of 18–24-year-olds identified as lesbian, 39% as bisexual, and 19% as queer. Comparatively, 55% of 45+ year olds identified as lesbian, 27% as bisexual, and 9% as queer. Queer identity in particular declined with age, while lesbian identity increased.[18] However, it is vital to recall that some of these variations are extremely small when considering the actual number. Additionally, there are 24 participants of unknown age.

(n=136)	**18-24**	**n=90**	**25-34**	**n=24**	**35-44**	**n=11**	**45+**	**n=11**
Lesbian	36	40%	12	50%	6	55%	6	55%
Gay	2	2%	1	4%	0	0%	1	9%
Bisexual	35	39%	7	29%	3	27%	3	27%
Queer	17	19%	4	17%	2	18%	1	9%

Table 2 Survey participants age and sexual orientation.

[18] Interestingly, this is more obviously true only when the age categories are collapsed into 45+. If the 45-54 and 54+ categories are kept intact, we actually see lesbian identity decrease to 43% among 45-54 before increasing to 75% among 55+. However, queer identity decreases to 14% among 45-54 and 0% among 55+.

Participants were also asked about the highest degree or level of education they had completed; 136 answered the question. The majority of participants had either completed some college credit (*n=51,* 38%) or had an undergraduate or trade degree (*n=49,* 36%). A further 17% *(n=23)* had a graduate or professional degree. The remaining 10% (*n=13)* had a high school diploma or GED equivalent.

Participants were asked which state and county they considered their permanent residence. A total of 136 participants answered their state, and 128 answered their county. Participants were overwhelmingly from urban counties (*n=118*, 92%). While there was a wide range of states represented in the results, most states had only one or two participants. There were 41 counties across 20 states identified as participants' permanent residences; however, 111 participants were from Indiana, and 52 were from Monroe County, where the research was based.

4.2.2 Interviews

Interviews are a qualitative method of data collection frequently used in library research in order to "access people's experiences and their inner perceptions, attitudes, and feelings of reality" (Wildemuth & Zhang, 2017, p. 239). There are three basic structures interviews tend to follow: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. Structured interviews can be compared to oral surveys; there is a pre-defined set of questions, and all questions are asked of all participants. There may also be a limited number of responses accepted. Semi-structured interviews typically involve preparing an interview guide of open and closed-ended questions; however, the interviewer can deviate to some extent. Unstructured interviews contain no pre-determined questions. Instead, the researcher is guided by the participants through conversation with minimal control. Unstructured interviews are conversational and less intrusive than the other

structures and can be helpful in generating models and developing theory. However, they are also more time-consuming than other interview structures, require researchers to be sensitive to the amount of control they exert, and produce data that can be difficult to analyze systematically. Semi-structured interviews are a middle ground in interviewing. They offer a higher level of flexibility than structured interviews by allowing the interviewer to change the order of questions, alter the wording, offer explanations, omit questions that do not seem appropriate, and add questions when it is appropriate. For instance, Kitzie et al. (2022) described that throughout their interview process, "as interviews progressed, members of the research team developed specific research questions to be nested under these broad ones based on themes developing from initial interviews" (p. 219).

Interview Schedule

Interviews were conducted with two subject groups: information users and librarians. The interviews with both groups were semi-structured and followed principles of ethnographic interviewing (Westby et al., 2003). Westby et al. suggested that ethnographic interviews involve two types of questions, descriptive and structural. Descriptive questions are "broad and general and allow people to describe their experiences, their daily activities, and objects and people in their lives," while structural questions are "used to explore responses to descriptive questions" (p. 4). Westby et al.'s work was focused on speech and hearing pathologists; however, there is precedence for engaging in ethnographic interviews in LIS research, as this structure can help "gain a deep understanding of subjects' experiences and perspectives," as well as potentially "counteract[ing] participants' tendency to provide answers crafted to please the researchers" (Becnel & Moeller, 2022, p. 10). Within their ethnographic interviews, participants were asked "to describe, recall, or imagine various scenarios and allowed them ample time and space to tell

the stories that came to mind for them" (p. 11). Becnel and Moeller's study was not focused on information needs or behavior, so their exact interview schedule is not applicable; however, I used their methodological setup to inform my interviews.

The purpose of the interviews was to develop a richer understanding of the data provided by the survey. Initial interview questions were informed by research from Kitzie (2017) and Schaller (2011); however, as semi-structured interviews, there was room for questions that arose during interviews. For the initial interview protocols, see Appendices B (Information User) and C (Librarian). All interviews were transcribed and entered into NVivo 15 for analysis.

Participant Requirements and Recruitment

Information Users

Interview participation requirements for information users were the same as those for the survey. That is, participants had to be 18 or more years of age, identify as a woman, and identify as being attracted to women. Four interviews were conducted prior to the survey. (See Table 3.) The remaining six interviews were recruited via the survey. Except for two initial interviews, all interviews were conducted via Zoom and were recorded with closed captioning. The closed captioning was edited and corrected for analysis. The two interviews conducted in person were audio-recorded and manually transcribed for analysis. Information user interviews took place between May 2025 and November 2025. The difficulties encountered with interviews will be further discussed in chapter 6.5.

Interview Type	# Prior to Survey	# Concurrent	Total Number
Information Users	4 (May-July 2025)	6 (August-November 2025)	10
Librarians	4 (July 2025)	1 (September 2025)	5
Total	8	7	15

Table 3 Interviews conducted in relation to survey collection.

Ten information users participated in interviews. Detailed demographic questions were not asked during the interview. To protect participants' identities, I avoided building a strong demographic profile of interviewees. However, through the process of conducting the interviews, I compiled a rough demographic sketch of the participants. Table 4 gives a brief description of each participant. Overall, interview participants were from diverse backgrounds. They ranged from 19/20-year-old college undergraduates to professionals over 45 years old. Half of the participants were currently in college (either undergraduate or graduate), while the other half ranged from high school diploma to advanced degrees. Participants were from multiple racial backgrounds, including Black/African American, Asian and South Asian, and White. Half of the participants were cisgender, while the other half were either transgender or nonbinary, and sexual orientations included lesbian, bisexual, and queer.

Participant	**Description**
Info. User 1	Bisexual, Nonbinary, 25-34,
Info. User 2	Lesbian, Cisgender, 35-44,
Info. User 3	Transgender, 25-34
Info. User 4	Lesbian, Transgender, 45+
Info. User 5	Queer, Cisgender, 18-24
Info. User 6	Lesbian, Cisgender, 25-34
Info. User 7	Cisgender, 18-24
Info. User 8	Lesbian, Transgender, 18-24
Info. User 9	Nonbinary, Bisexual, 18-24
Info. User 10	Cisgender, Queer, 18-24

Table 4 Sexual orientation, gender identity, and age of interview participants (when known).

Librarians

In order to participate in interviews, librarians were required to be over 18 years of age and currently work in a library doing librarian tasks. Specific job titles could vary based on the institution. Librarians were recruited via professional listservs and discussion boards, as well as through word of mouth and snowball sampling; however, snowball sampling was not successful,

likely due to concerns over revealing participation in the interviews. Five librarians participated in interviews between July 2025 and September 2025. All librarian interviews were conducted via Zoom and were recorded with closed captioning. Closed captions were edited and corrected for analysis.

The decision to include interviews with librarians was made to gain a better understanding of what is happening in libraries related to LGBTQ+ patrons, particularly women. While much of the research that has been done on the topic has either been written by librarians or by researchers interviewing librarians, the interviews here are able to provide a unique perspective: all of the librarians interviewed here were LGBTQ+ women. Librarians were not required to be an LBQ women in order to participate; however, they are the librarians who expressed interest and followed through on interviews. Once that became clear, it was an interesting perspective to have, as it allowed the librarians interviewed to provide dual perspectives as both librarians and members of the community being discussed.

The librarians interviewed had a variety of backgrounds, encompassing collection development, interlibrary loan, reference, collection management, cataloging, and public services, as well as library administration (see Table 5). Librarians were equally split between public and academic libraries: two in academic, two in public, and one who discussed working in both. It became clear early in the first interview that state and county political leanings played an important role in the experiences of librarians and their patrons. Three librarians worked in red (Republican voting) states, one worked in a blue (Democrat voting) state, and one worked in an extremely red county within what is usually viewed as a blue state.

Librarian	Description
Librarian 1	Public, Director
Librarian 2	Academic, Head librarian
Librarian 3	Public, Head of tech services
Librarian 4	Academic, Reference and instruction
Librarian 5	Academic, Public services/reference

Table 5 Descriptions of librarians interviewed.

4.3 Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using mixed methods content analysis. Content analysis can refer to either a quantitative or qualitative method of data analysis. Typically, the quantitative method is simply referred to as "content analysis," (Spurgin & Wildemuth, 2017, p. 307) while the qualitative method may be referred to as "qualitative analysis of content" or "thematic analysis" (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017, p. 319). Hereafter, qualitative content analysis will be referred to as thematic analysis for ease of differentiation.

The data from the survey was analyzed using quantitative content analysis, while data from the interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis. For the thematic analysis, I took an inductive approach that "ground[s] the examination of topics and themes, as well as the inferences drawn from them, in the data," at times generating theory (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017, p. 319). Thematic content analysis allows the researcher to revise the codebook based off of the data, making it popular in cases where there is a lack of prior research. This approach has previously been taken in research into LGBTQ+ library research. Walker and Bates (2016), for example, stated: "Given the lack of research on the topic…this study was exploratory in nature and, consequently, a qualitative, inductive approach was taken, guided by a critical interpretive methodology" (p. 271). They adopted a "four-stage process that involved a preliminary reading of all results, a response-by-response comparison, and a readthrough of each survey group's responses collectively," followed by comparing responses from librarians and LGBTQ+

individuals (p. 272). Attwell (2020) followed a similar process that involved two rounds of analysis. First, she used "an open coding process to establish an initial coding scheme and structure," then she "consolidated, split and added further coding to refine my initial coding scheme and create the final themes that are presented…" (p. 65). Since the goal of thematic analysis is not necessarily to be generalizable to an entire population, samples can be relatively smaller and are often purposive. This leads to results that are "textual descriptions, typologies, and descriptive models" (Spurgin & Wildemuth, 2017, p. 308).

Mixing quantitative and qualitative content analysis is a relatively common approach. As one author states, "qualitative analysis deals with the forms and antecedent-consequent patterns of form, while quantitative analysis deals with the duration and frequency of form" (Smith, 1975, p. 218 quoted in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017, p. 319). Content analysis, both qualitative and quantitative, is a common method for analyzing survey research (Attwell, 2020b; Walker & Bates, 2016) as well as interviews (Oltmann, 2016).

Chapter 5. Findings

5.1 RQ1: What are the information needs and behaviors of lesbians and queer women?

Information Sources

Survey participants were asked about their use of 16 sources of information (see figure 6). All 160 participants responded to the question. The five most commonly sought out information sources were: Friends—LGBTQ+ (*n=153*; 96%), Books—Fiction (*n=122,* 76%), Movies or television shows—Fictional (*n=122,* 76%), Internet searches (*n=118*, 74%), and Image/Video based social media (*n=113*, 71%). The five least commonly sought out information sources were Other (*n=2*, 1%), AI Services (*n=8;* 5%), Clergy or other religious authorities (*n=11*, 7%), Newspapers or magazines (*n=23*, 14%), and Academic journal articles (*n=42*, 26%). Under Other, participants answered, "Queer art" and "Lesbian Connection print magazine."

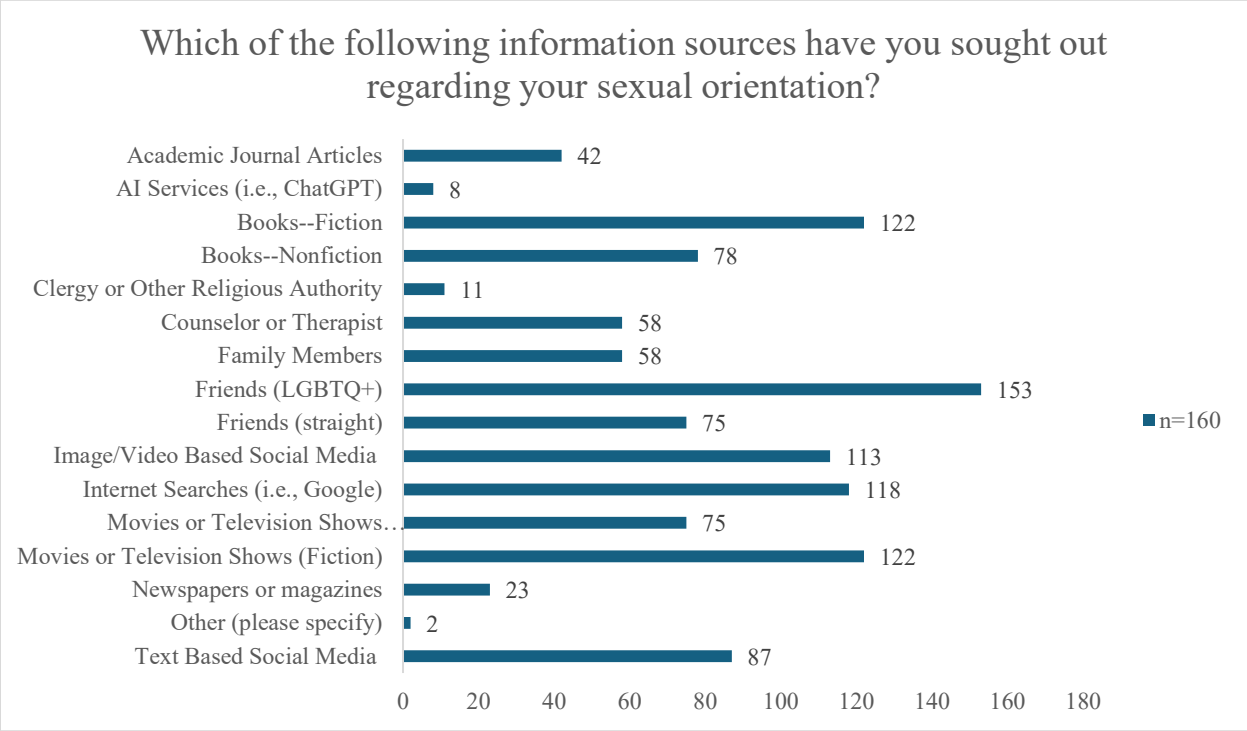

Figure 6 Responses to survey question "Which of the following information sources have you sought out with regard to your sexuality?"

Some differences can be observed when information sources selected are broken down by participants. Table 6 shows the results of information sources by sexual orientation.[19] The order of the most selected information sources for lesbian participants is the same as the total: Friends (LGBTQ+), Books—Fiction, Movies or television shows—Fiction, Internet searches, and Image/Video based social media. However, for both bisexual and queer participants, the order of the most selected information sources was different. For bisexual participants, the top five selected information sources were: Friends (LGBTQ+), Movies or television shows—Fiction, Internet searches, Image/Video based social media, and Books—Fiction. While 81% of lesbians selected Books—Fiction as an information source, only 74% of queer participants and 72% of bisexual participants did so. Similarly, the least selected information sources for lesbians mirrored the overall least selected information sources (Other, Clergy, AI, Newspapers or magazines, Academic journal articles), while bisexual and queer participants selected AI more than they selected Clergy.

The most notable difference in the selection of information sources by sexual orientation was Friends—Straight, which was selected by 61% of bisexual participants, compared to 52% of queer participants and only 26% lesbian participants. This particular example will be further discussed in chapter 6.3.

[19] While the results for participants who selected "gay" as best matching their sexual orientation are included in the table, given the very small number, they are not further discussed.

Information Source	Lesbian	n=75	Gay	n=4	Bi	n=54	Queer	n=27	Total	n=160
Academic Journal Articles	24	32%	0	0%	9	17%	9	33%	42	26%
AI Services (i.e., ChatGPT)	3	4%	0	0%	3	6%	2	7%	8	5%
Books--Fiction	61	81%	2	50%	39	72%	20	74%	122	76%
Books--Nonfiction	45	60%	1	25%	20	37%	12	44%	78	49%
Clergy or Other Religious Authority	7	9%	2	50%	0	0%	2	7%	11	7%
Counselor or Therapist	33	44%	1	25%	14	26%	10	37%	58	36%
Family Members	29	39%	2	50%	17	31%	10	37%	58	36%
Friends (LGBTQ+)	72	96%	3	75%	51	94%	27	100%	153	96%
Friends (straight)	26	35%	2	50%	33	61%	14	52%	75	47%
Image/Video Based Social Media	52	69%	3	75%	40	74%	18	67%	113	71%
Internet Searches (i.e., Google)	56	75%	2	50%	40	74%	20	74%	118	74%
Movies or Television Shows (Documentary/Nonfiction)	43	57%	2	50%	18	33%	12	44%	75	47%
Movies or Television Shows (Fiction)	56	75%	3	75%	40	74%	23	85%	122	76%
Newspapers or magazines	11	15%	1	25%	6	11%	5	19%	23	14%
Other (please specify)	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	1	4%	2	1%
Text Based Social Media	43	57%	2	50%	28	52%	14	52%	87	54%

Table 6 Frequency of information sources selected by sexual orientation.

There were some differences seen in information sources selected by age. However, it is necessary to note that 15% of respondents were of unknown ages (see Table 7). There are several information sources that were more popular among the older age groups. For instance, 73% of participants in the 45+ group selected Newspapers or magazines, compared to 7% of 18-24, 17% of 25-34, and 9% of 35–44-year-olds. Nonfiction media was also selected more often among the older age groups. Nonfiction books were selected by 82% of both 35-44 and 45+ age groups, compared to 40% of 18-24 and 42% of 25-34. Documentary/nonfiction movies or television shows were particularly high among the 45+ group, at 82%, compared to 43% of 18-24, 46% of 25-34, and only 36% of 35–44-year-olds. There were also several instances in which younger age groups selected information sources at a higher rate than older age groups. Internet searches,

image/video based social media, and text based social media were all selected by higher percentages of 18-24- and 25–34-year-olds. Interestingly, however, in all three cases, the information source was selected at a higher rate by 45+ than 35-44.

Information Source	18-24	n=90	25-34	n=24	35-44	n=11	45+	n=11	Age ?	n=24	Total	n=160
Academic Journal Articles	20	22%	8	33%	3	27%	4	36%	7	29%	42	26%
AI Services (i.e., ChatGPT)	4	4%	2	8%	1	9%	0	0%	1	4%	8	5%
Books--Fiction	67	74%	18	75%	8	73%	9	82%	20	83%	122	76%
Books--Nonfiction	36	40%	10	42%	9	82%	9	82%	14	58%	78	49%
Clergy or Other Religious Authority	5	6%	3	13%	0	0%	1	9%	2	8%	11	7%
Counselor or Therapist	32	36%	8	33%	4	36%	6	55%	8	33%	58	36%
Family Members	36	40%	8	33%	2	18%	5	45%	7	29%	58	36%
Friends (LGBTQ+)	85	94%	23	96%	11	100%	11	100%	23	96%	153	96%
Friends (straight)	45	50%	13	54%	4	36%	6	55%	7	29%	75	47%
Image/Video Based Social Media	68	76%	15	63%	5	45%	8	73%	17	71%	113	71%
Internet Searches (i.e., Google)	73	81%	15	63%	5	45%	8	73%	17	71%	118	74%
Movies or Television Shows (Documentary)	39	43%	11	46%	4	36%	9	82%	12	50%	75	47%
Movies or Television Shows (Fiction)	68	76%	18	75%	6	55%	10	91%	20	83%	122	76%
Newspapers or magazines	6	7%	4	17%	1	9%	8	73%	4	17%	23	14%
Other (please specify)	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	1	9%	0	0%	2	1%
Text Based Social Media	44	79%	14	58%	6	55%	8	73%	15	63%	87	54%

Table 7 Frequency of information sources selected by age.

Participants were also asked to rank their selected information sources from most helpful (1) to least helpful (number of sources selected, maximum 16); 139 participants ranked their information sources (see Table 8). Friends (LGBTQ+) was ranked the most helpful information

source, having a mean ranking of 2.10 (out of 16 sources), as well as low variance and standard deviation, and the highest number of responses.

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
Academic Journal Articles	1.00	11.00	5.93	2.75	7.57	40
AI Services (i.e., ChatGPT)	1.00	10.00	5.00	2.83	8.00	7
Books--Fiction	1.00	10.00	4.28	2.21	4.88	109
Books--Nonfiction	1.00	11.00	4.96	2.37	5.62	71
Clergy or Other Religious Authority	2.00	12.00	8.82	3.19	10.15	11
Counselor or Therapist	1.00	10.00	4.94	2.66	7.05	52
Family Members	1.00	12.00	5.94	2.90	8.44	52
Friends (LGBTQ+)	1.00	7.00	2.10	1.39	1.94	135
Friends (straight)	2.00	12.00	5.26	2.39	5.73	69
Image/Video Based Social Media (i.e., Instagram/TikTok/Youtube)	1.00	12.00	4.20	2.69	7.22	102
Internet Searches (i.e., Google)	1.00	13.00	4.95	2.89	8.38	107
Movies or Television Shows (Documentary/Nonfiction)	1.00	11.00	5.85	2.24	5.04	68
Movies or Television Shows (Fictional)	1.00	12.00	4.77	2.37	5.64	107
Newspapers or magazines	1.00	13.00	6.14	3.47	12.03	21
Other (please specify)	3.00	5.00	4.00	1.00	1.00	2
Text Based Social Media (i.e., Twitter/Bluesky/Facebook)	1.00	12.00	4.95	2.85	8.12	79

Table 8 Descriptive statistics for ranking of information sources from most to least helpful.

The most common resource interview participants utilized to meet their information needs was the internet. Nine of the 10 participants mentioned searching Google, social media, or broadly “the internet” as one of the first places they looked for information. Four participants

said they usually purchased books (physical and e-books), either because they wanted to support authors or because they could not find materials at a library. Three participants immediately mentioned regularly using a library to meet their information needs.

Information Topics

Survey participants were asked if they had sought out 20 topics related to their sexuality (see figure 7).[20] Out of the 160 participants, 148 responded. The five most selected information topics were "experiences of other LGBTQ+ individuals" (*n=115*, 78%), "dating" (*n=105*, 71%), "social gatherings, cultural events" (*n=104*, 70%), "social, political, and legal marginalization" (*n=96,* 65%) and "dealing with/accepting sexual identity" (*n=95*, 64%). The five least selected information topics were "financial issues" (*n=7*, 5%), "family law (divorce, child custody), general law" (*n=16*, 11%), "counseling/psychological resources" (*n=39*, 26%), "finding support groups, associations, conferences" (*n=40,* 27%), and "dealing with crimes and hatred against LGBTQ+" (*n=40*, 27%).

[20] There was also an option for "other"; however, since no one selected this option, it was removed from analysis.

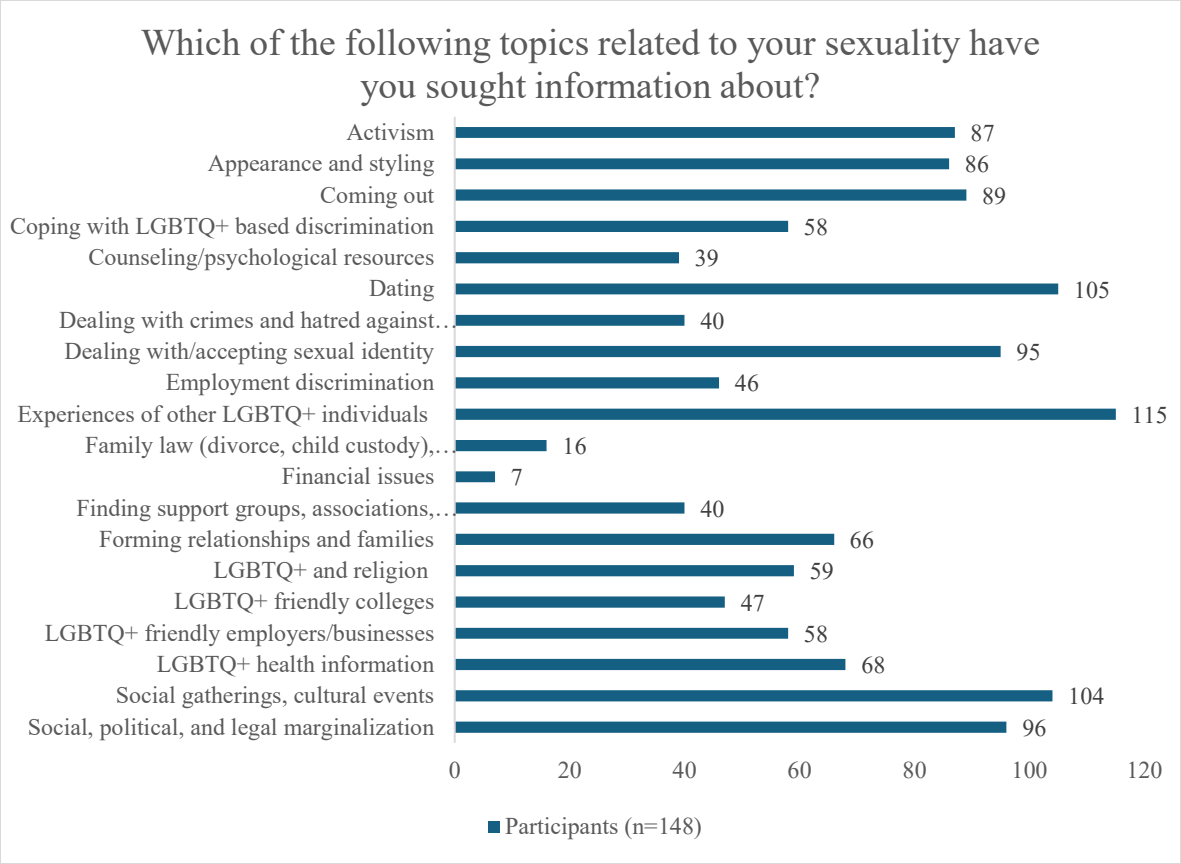

Figure 7 Topics participants sought information about, from most to least selected.

Similarly to information sources, there is variation in topics according to sexual orientation (see Table 9). In this case, the most selected topics are not only in a different order, but in some groups the top five contain different topics. Lesbian and bisexual participants' most selected topics were the same as the overall most selected topics, albeit in different orders, and with the addition of "coming out" tied for 5th most selected topic among bisexual participants. The top five most selected topics among queer participants, however, included activism and appearance/styling, which were selected by 84% and 72%, respectively. In comparison, 58% of lesbian participants and 50% of bisexual participants selected activism and 61% of lesbians and 48% of bisexuals selected appearance/styling.

Also of note are the differences of interest in health, both physical and mental. Of the 67 lesbian participants who answered this question, 60% (n=40) selected LGBTQ+ health information and

39% (*n*=26) selected counseling/psychological services. Comparatively, LGBTQ+ health information was selected by only 29% (*n=15)* of bisexual participants and 44% *(n*=11) of queer participants, while counseling/psychological services was selected by 8% (*n*=4) of bisexual participants and 36% (*n*=9) of queer participants.

Topic	Lesbian	n=67	Gay	n=4	Bi	n=52	Queer	n=25	Total	n=148
Activism	39	58%	1	25%	26	50%	21	84%	87	59%
Appearance and styling	41	61%	2	50%	25	48%	18	72%	86	58%
Coming out	43	64%	2	50%	30	58%	14	56%	89	60%
Coping with LGBTQ+ based discrimination	30	45%	1	25%	18	35%	9	36%	58	39%
Counseling/psychological resources	26	39%	0	0%	4	8%	9	36%	39	26%
Dating	50	75%	2	50%	36	69%	17	68%	105	71%
Dealing with crimes and hatred against LGBTQ+	23	34%	0	0%	9	17%	8	32%	40	27%
Dealing with/accepting sexual identity	49	73%	2	50%	30	58%	14	56%	95	64%
Employment discrimination	27	40%	0	0%	11	21%	8	32%	46	31%
Experiences of other LGBTQ+ individuals	52	78%	3	75%	39	75%	21	84%	115	78%
Family law (divorce, child custody), general law	10	15%	1	25%	2	4%	3	12%	16	11%
Financial issues	6	9%	0	0%	1	2%	0	0%	7	5%
Finding support groups, associations, conferences	23	34%	0	0%	9	17%	8	32%	40	27%
Forming relationships and families	29	43%	2	50%	23	44%	12	48%	66	45%
LGBTQ+ and religion	30	45%	2	50%	18	35%	9	36%	59	40%
LGBTQ+ friendly colleges	29	43%	0	0%	10	19%	8	32%	47	32%
LGBTQ+ friendly employers/businesses	28	42%	1	25%	19	37%	10	40%	58	39%
LGBTQ+ health information	40	60%	2	50%	15	29%	11	44%	68	46%
Social gatherings, cultural events	49	73%	2	50%	33	63%	20	80%	104	70%
Social, political, and legal marginalization	44	66%	1	25%	34	65%	17	68%	96	65%

Table 9 Frequency of information topics selected by sexual orientation.

As with information sources, there are some differences seen between age groups with regards to information topics selected (table 10). For all four known age groups, the top five most selected topics included experiences of other LGBTQ+ individuals, social

gatherings/cultural events, and dating. However, the 18-24 and 35-44 groups included dealing with/accepting sexual identity, while the 25-34 and 45+ groups included social, political, and legal marginalization. Interestingly, each age group had a different fifth most selected topic: coming out (18-24), appearance and styling (25-34), LGBTQ+ health information (35-44), and activism (45+).

Topic	18-24	n=90	25-34	n=24	35-44	n=11	45+	n=11	Age ?	n=12	Total	n= 148
Activism	52	58%	14	58%	5	45%	8	73%	8	67%	87	59%
Appearance and styling	53	59%	15	63%	5	45%	6	55%	7	58%	86	58%
Coming out	57	63%	14	58%	5	45%	4	36%	9	75%	89	60%
Coping with LGBTQ+ based discrimination	33	37%	7	29%	3	27%	5	45%	10	83%	58	39%
Counseling/ psychological resources	22	24%	7	29%	1	9%	4	36%	5	42%	39	26%
Dating	60	67%	18	75%	7	64%	8	73%	12	100%	105	71%
Dealing with crimes and hatred against LGBTQ+	21	23%	6	25%	1	9%	5	45%	7	58%	40	27%
Dealing with/accepting sexual identity	60	67%	12	50%	8	73%	5	45%	10	83%	95	64%
Employment discrimination	28	31%	4	17%	4	36%	4	36%	6	50%	46	31%
Experiences of other LGBTQ+ individuals	67	74%	19	79%	7	64%	10	91%	12	100%	115	78%
Family law (divorce, child custody), general law	6	7%	3	13%	1	9%	2	18%	4	33%	16	11%
Financial issues	3	3%	1	4%	0	0%	3	27%	0	0%	7	5%
Finding support groups, associations, conferences	25	28%	2	8%	2	18%	7	64%	4	33%	40	27%
Forming relationships and families	40	44%	10	42%	4	36%	4	36%	8	67%	66	45%
LGBTQ+ and religion	36	40%	9	38%	4	36%	3	27%	7	58%	59	40%
LGBTQ+ friendly colleges	34	38%	4	17%	1	9%	3	27%	5	42%	47	32%
LGBTQ+ friendly employers/businesses	33	37%	10	42%	4	36%	5	45%	6	50%	58	39%
LGBTQ+ health information	36	40%	9	38%	7	64%	7	64%	9	75%	68	46%
Social gatherings, cultural events	61	68%	16	67%	9	82%	11	100%	7	58%	104	70%
Social, political, and legal marginalization	55	61%	15	63%	6	55%	10	91%	10	83%	96	65%

Table 10 Frequency of information topics selected by age.

Participants were asked to rank their selected topics of information from most important (1) to least important (out of total selected; maximum 20); 131 participants ranked their topics (see Table 11). There was a high degree of variance in the ranking of information topics, and pointing to one topic as the most important overall is difficult. Experiences of other LGBTQ+ individuals was mentioned by the highest number of individuals (106); however, the mean ranking of this topic was 4.19, which is higher (i.e., ranked lower in importance) than dealing with/accepting sexual identity (*M*=2.95, *n=85)* and social/political/legal marginalization (*M=4.04*, *n=89*).

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
Activism	1.00	16.00	5.56	3.75	14.07	80
Appearance and styling	1.00	15.00	7.06	3.56	12.67	79
Coming out	1.00	13.00	4.74	3.18	10.09	80
Coping with LGBTQ+ based discrimination	1.00	17.00	6.42	3.29	10.81	53
Counseling/psychological resources	1.00	15.00	5.97	3.76	14.13	37
Dating	1.00	19.00	6.02	3.68	13.57	93
Dealing with crimes and hatred against LGBTQ+	1.00	15.00	7.17	3.65	13.34	35
Dealing with/accepting sexual identity	1.00	14.00	2.95	3.03	9.20	85
Employment discrimination	2.00	14.00	7.69	3.14	9.83	42
Experiences of other LGBTQ+ individuals	1.00	15.00	4.19	3.06	9.36	106
Family law (divorce, child custody), general law	1.00	18.00	9.50	4.42	19.54	14
Financial issues	1.00	18.00	9.86	6.38	40.69	7
Finding support groups, associations, conferences	1.00	17.00	7.92	4.91	24.07	38
Forming relationships and families	1.00	17.00	7.28	4.08	16.64	60
LGBTQ+ and religion	1.00	18.00	7.36	4.14	17.14	53
LGBTQ+ friendly colleges	1.00	20.00	7.63	4.26	18.19	43
LGBTQ+ friendly employers/businesses	1.00	15.00	7.21	3.39	11.52	53
LGBTQ+ health information	1.00	17.00	7.57	4.15	17.26	63
Social gatherings, cultural events	1.00	19.00	5.91	4.10	16.77	96
Social, political, and legal marginalization	1.00	11.00	4.04	2.43	5.89	89

Table 11 Descriptive statistics for topics participants sought information about.

Overall, interview participants were emphatic about having special information needs related to their sexual orientation. Six participants immediately responded with answers ranging from “yeah” (Participant 5; Participant 6) to “definitely” (Participant 7), “absolutely” (Participant 3; Participant 8) and “certainly” (Participant 4). Participant 1 described knowing that they had particular information needs but having trouble verbalizing questions in order to find

information. Two participants initially said they did not have special information needs. Participant 10 said she was interested in queer-related books but had not considered it to be a *need.* Participant 2 ended up identifying information needs she had but perhaps had not explicitly thought of them as such. Similarly, Participant 9 noted that while she did have special information needs, she didn't know if she had ever consciously thought about trying to find books with queer characters as something that would help her.

Interview participants' information needs fell into six categories (Table 12). The most commonly mentioned information need expressed was the need for materials. Participants voiced a need for materials such as audiobooks, e-books, movies, physical books, and web novels. Fiction, in particular, was mentioned by four participants. The need for materials can be considered a manifestation of the next most commonly mentioned need, which could essentially be described as understanding/validation. Participants voiced sentiments such as "it was a rough time in my life in a lot of ways, so it was the one thing of, hey, maybe there is hope" (Participant 4) and "…having some form of…representation…that was helpful…in, like, reducing senses of isolation… and… having… characters self-actualize was also like, wow, I can do that too!" (Participant 9). Participants voiced similar needs for queer representation and the history or experiences of others. One participant mentioned the need for information on navigating family relationships, as well as information on safe spaces.

For some participants, information around their sexual orientation/sexual identity was intimately tied to information around their gender identity. Two participants discussed information needs regarding HRT (hormone replacement therapy). Related to health information, two participants mentioned the lack of sex education for lesbians.

Though less common, there were several mentions of information needs that were less personal and more professional or academic in nature. This included one participant who works in a public health-related field and another who studied LGBTQ+ communities for her graduate degree. A third participant mentioned having completed some queer studies during her undergraduate degree and expressed continued interest in scholarly queer materials.

Code	
Materials (Audiobooks, e-books, fiction, movies, physical books, web novels)	17
Understanding/Validation (Hope; Not alone; Understanding feelings)	8
Health information; Sex education	4
Queer representation/Others' experiences/Queer history	4
Professional Health Information/Academic Research/Queer theory	3
Navigating familial relationships; safe spaces	2

Table 12 Information needs expressed by participants, by number of mentions.

Nine of the 10 participants responded that their information needs had changed at least somewhat, though one said the changes were life-stage changes more than coming out. Participant 9 said, "I think when I was younger, I had a lot more angst around just, like, what is happening to me? Is this okay?... I think it was less a function of coming out status and more just kind of life stage, where I was like, I'm not as worried about this anymore. I think as a teen who was really looking for validation and everything, and at a very critical life stage, I was more worried about needing to find stories where other people were feeling validated for whatever was happening, and then as an adult I'm more so like I don't want to spend time with people who don't care about that anyways, let me just find something that's interesting." Similarly, Participant 4, who is both lesbian and trans, described two experiences that were vastly different. First, she recounted an early experience, "When I was attending college, I tried to start transitioning, it went disastrously… I found in [college's] collection two books…neither of

which I would actually recommend, other than for their historical position and value…One was a much more scientific tome from I want to say 1969, and very much was a product of its time in many ways…And then there was an autobiography from the 70s. But it was a, let's call it, necessary lifeline." Today, she described her preference for purchasing books and supporting authors, noting the "embarrassment of riches, if you will, of having connections to friends who are authors and are focusing on literature in those areas." Later, she stated, "I'm in a very different… position in my life. Where, since reaching middle age, going through a divorce, etc., I've kind of hit the… I have no fucks left to give about a lot of things… My answer probably would have been different 20 years ago."

Age was also mentioned by Participant 2, who suggested, "I think it also depends on the age of the person," in response to what might make LBQ women more comfortable in libraries. Age also plays a part in the information sources that were available when participants were first navigating their sexual orientation. While college-aged participants said things such as "I usually default to the internet" (Participant 8) and "I've kind of felt like I've adapted to the digital age. I'm more apt to using my phone or my computer to search for information or search for… different outlets, instead of physically going to a library," (Participant 7) both of which show strong familiarly with online spaces, older participants describe trying to find information before it was widely available online. Participant 4 said, "Granted I was a [computer science] major, so I was about as online as you could be, but I don't know that web forums, the ancient web forums even existed yet at that point." Similarly, Participant 2 mentioned that close to 20 years ago, she was trying to find resources that "a lot of people [now] have access to online, which makes it easier."

The idea of information wants and preferences versus information needs was brought up multiple times. For Participant 1, coming out turned wants into needs: "I think it changed a lot of information I want to know into information I need to know… the history behind the rights that we have today and understanding the level of violence that comes along with being queer… at first it was like if I'm going to come out I should probably know this information, and now that I've been out for a very long time, it's more of a 'this is something I need to know in the back of my head, in any space I go to.'" For others, it was the opposite. Participant 6 stated, "I think it definitely changed my information preferences. Like when I'm looking for a fiction romance book to read, I'm always searching…specifically lesbian books to read, just because I can relate to them more, and I like the storylines a lot more."

Overall, participants did not report feeling personally disadvantaged when it came to finding information, although several discussed general societal disadvantages to LBQ women, and all 10 discussed barriers they had faced. Participant 8 stated, "I feel that…people in general are disadvantaged when it comes to LGBTQ information, especially LGBTQ history, because it's been so censored and everything." Another expressed concern over libraries reducing the number of LGBTQ+ books available due to the political climate in the United States. Participants also discussed the absence of materials as a barrier. For instance, Participant 2 pointed out the lack of data on LGBTQ+ health, while Participant 9 specifically noted the lack of intersectional representation in media. Finally, Participant 3 discussed institutional access as a barrier to health information that is behind a paywall.

In librarian interviews, I posed the question, "Do you think lesbian, bisexual, and queer women patrons have any special information needs, distinct from those of heterosexual women or other LGBTQ+ patrons who are not women?" The responses were overwhelmingly yes.

Librarian 5 said she suspected so, though she didn't necessarily know what exactly those needs were. Librarian 1 pointed out that information needs are not static, and the needs people have during one life stage are different from those during other life stages, so it would make sense that LBQ women would have different needs. Librarians 2 and 3 discussed the double marginalization faced by LBQ women in a society that favors men and heterosexuality. Librarian 4stated, "I have read many studies that, especially bisexual women, but queer women in general, have much higher rates of mental illnesses and eating disorders. And so I think that there's a lot more demand for that as well."

5.2 RQ2: What role do libraries play in meeting the information needs of lesbians and queer women?

Library Usage

Survey participants were asked a series of questions regarding their library usage. The first library question asked if participants have ever used a library to satisfy their information needs; if the participant selected no, they were automatically taken to the next section of the survey. Of the 142 participants who answered the question, 63 (44%) reported that they had not used a library to satisfy their information needs. The other 79 (56%) participants used either public, academic, or public and academic libraries. It should be noted that this question was asking specifically if participants had used a library to satisfy the information needs they had been thinking about in the previous section of the survey (i.e., information needs related to their sexual orientation). This should not be interpreted to necessarily mean that the 44% of respondents who said they had not used a library to satisfy their information needs have never been or never go to the library.

Figure 8 shows the breakdown of which type of library has been used by participants. Of the participants who had used a library, the majority selected both academic and public, followed by public only, and finally academic only.

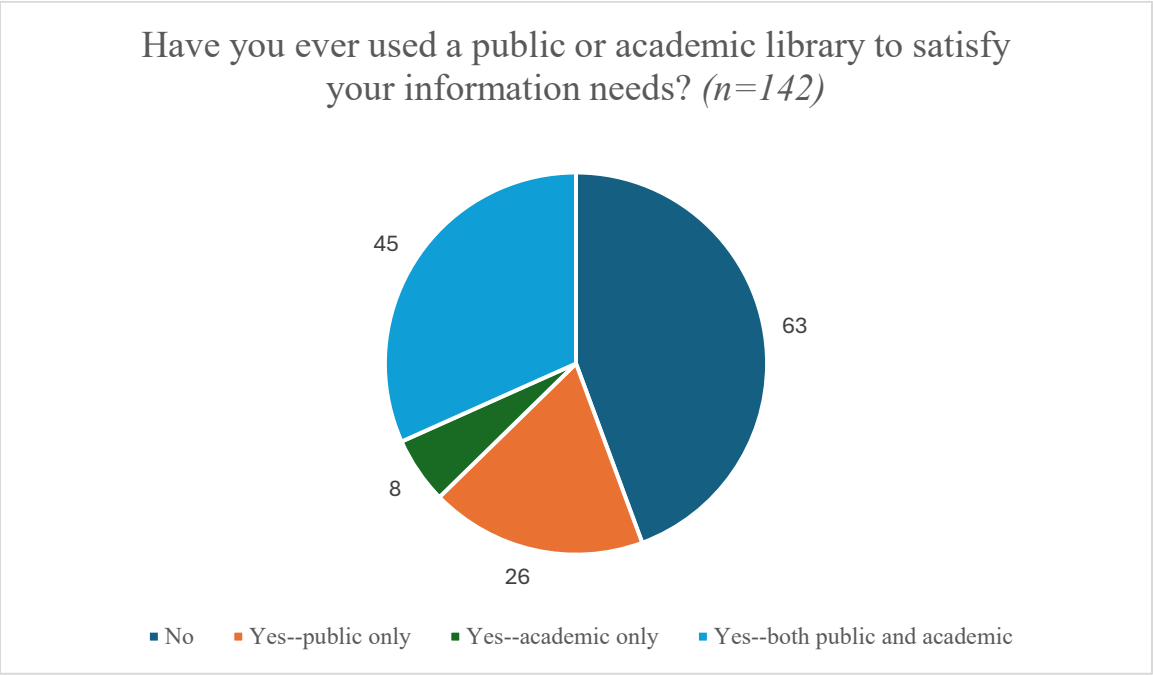

Figure 8 Survey participants' library usage.

Tables 13 to 15 look at library usage according to three different variables: sexual orientation, length of time being out, and age. Not everyone who answered about their library usage gave their age, leaving 136 cases to analyze instead of 142. Over half of responding lesbian and queer participants had used a library to satisfy their information needs, while slightly less than half of bisexual participants stated they had used a library.

Participants who reported being out for over five years reported having used a library more than participants who had been out less than five years. Of the 67 participants who had been out less than five years (7 out for less than a year, 60 out for between 1-5 years), 57% (*n*=38) reported they had *not* used a library, while of the 65 participants who had been out over 5 years, 66% (*n*=43) reported they *had* used a library. Participants aged 35-44 and 45+ were

overwhelmingly more likely to have used a library than not, while participants 18-24 and 25-34 were split approximately in half.

Have you ever used a public or academic library to satisfy your information needs?										
	Lesbian		Gay		Bisexual		Queer		Total	
No	27	42%	2	50%	25	51%	9	38%	63	44%
Yes	38	58%	2	50%	24	49%	15	63%	79	56%
Total	65		4		49		24		142	

Table 13 Library usage by sexual orientation.

Have you ever used a public or academic library to satisfy your information needs? x How long have you been out?					
	No		Yes		Total
Less than 1 year	4	57%	3	43%	7
1 to 5 years	34	57%	26	43%	60
More than 5 years	22	34%	43	66%	65
Not applicable	3	30%	7	70%	10
Total	63	44%	79	56%	142

Table 14 Library usage by length of time participant has been out.

Have you ever used a public or academic library to satisfy your information needs? x What is your age?					
	No		Yes		Total
18-24	46	51%	44	49%	90
25-34	12	50%	12	50%	24
35-44	1	9%	10	91%	11
45+	3	27%	8	73%	11
Total	62	46%	74	54%	136

Table 15 Library usage by age.

Next, participants were asked how often they used a library: once a week or more; more than once a month; once a month; every few months; once a year; or they had used a library in the past, but don't anymore. As shown in Table 16, nearly half of the responding participants reported using the library at least once a month. Over a quarter of responding participants reported using the library in the past, but not anymore.

Frequency	# of Responses	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Once a week or more	10	13.5%	13.5%
More than once a month	12	16.2%	29.7%
Once a month	8	10.8%	40.5%
Every few months	21	28.4%	68.9%
Once a year	4	5.4%	74.3%
I have used the library in the past, but don't anymore	19	25.7%	100%
Total	**74**	**100%**	**100%**

Table 16 How often participants use a library to meet information needs.

Participants mostly reported being somewhat or extremely comfortable using the library. Of the 73 responses, 43% *(n=31)* reported being extremely comfortable, and 34% *(n=25)* reported being somewhat comfortable. Only 3% *(n=2)* reported being extremely uncomfortable, 8% *(n=6)* somewhat uncomfortable, and the remaining 12% *(n=9)* were neither comfortable nor uncomfortable. The majority of participants did not report discrimination in libraries. Out of the 74 responses, 6 (8%) reported they "sometimes" felt discriminated against when using the library, and 68 (92%) reported "never" feeling discriminated against.

Participants were asked how satisfied they were with their library experiences (see figure 9).[21] Over half of the 73 respondents were "extremely satisfied" (*n=38*, 52%), and a further 37% were "somewhat satisfied" (*n=27*). Only 3 (4%) participants reported being "somewhat dissatisfied" with their library experiences.

[21] The survey also included the option "extremely dissatisfied." Since no participants selected this option, it is not included in the chart.

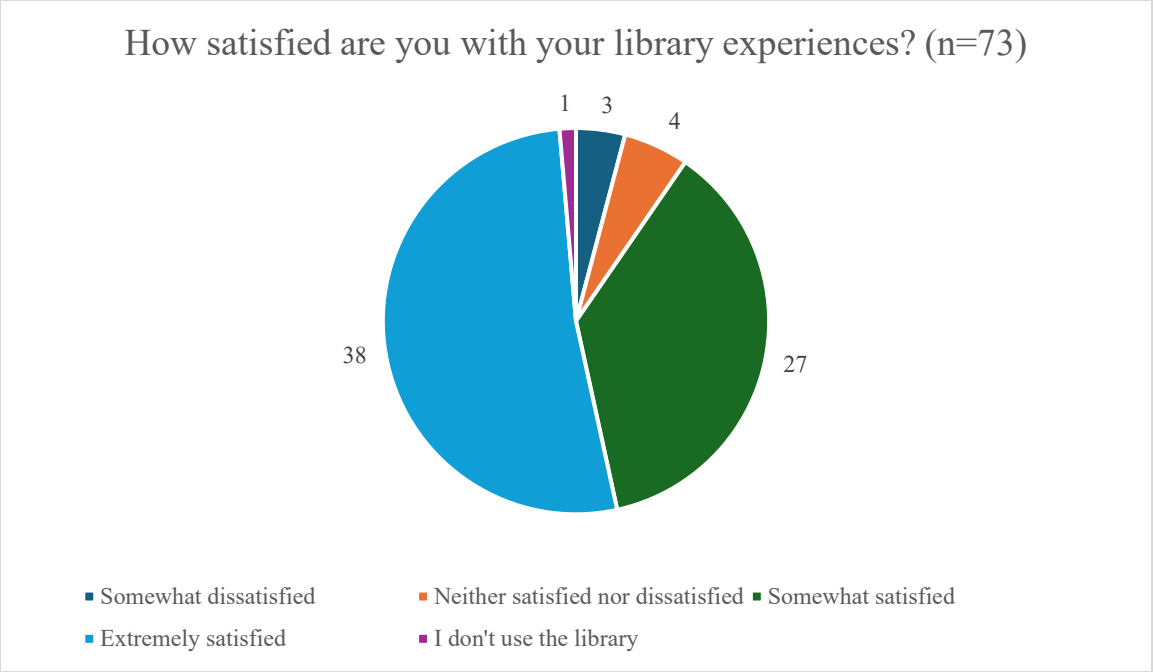

Figure 9 "How satisfied are you with your library experiences?"

Finally, there were two questions about use of and familiarity with several library services. Participants were asked if they had ever used five library services (see figure 10); 67 responded. The most selected options were checking out a physical book or film (*n*=47; 70%) and borrowing an e-book or digital film (*n=38*, 57%). A quarter of participants (*n=17)* reported having attended a library event such as a film screening, book talk, live reading, etc. The least selected option was asking a question through a virtual reference service such as online chat or email (*n=14*, 21%); however, 36% (*n=24*) reported having asked a question at an in-person desk.

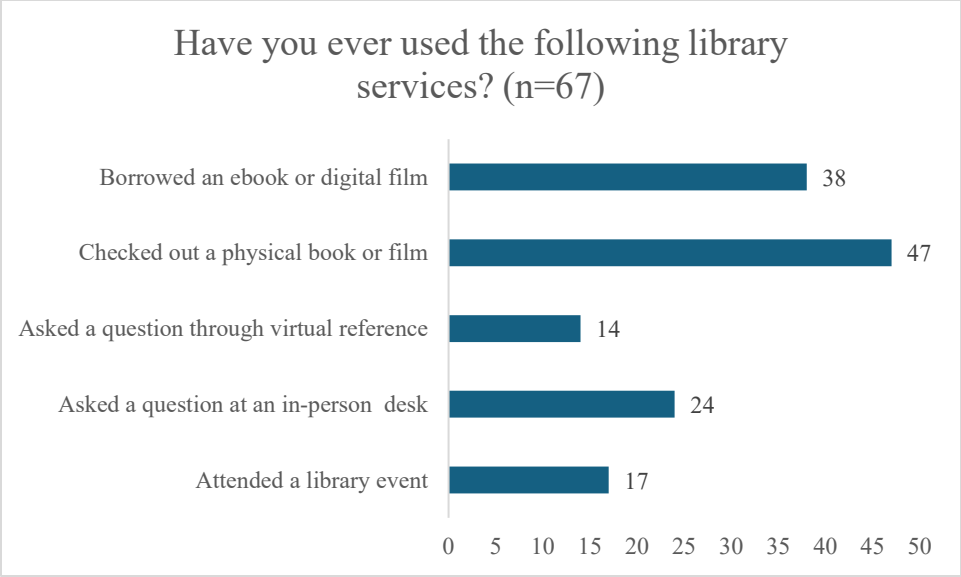

Figure 10 Participants who have used different library services.

Participants were asked about their awareness of an additional five library resources (see table 17); 74 answered. The least known resource was "a librarian specializing in women's/gender/sexuality studies," which 47% of participants responded they had never heard of, and only 16% reported they knew about it and had used it. A majority of participants either knew about and had used streaming video collections (42%) or had heard of them but were not sure how to use/locate them (39%). The most known and used resource was subject terms describing LGBTQ+ terms in catalogs/databases, with 43% reporting they had used subject

terms.

Field	I have never heard of it		I've heard of this but am not sure how to use it / locate it		Yes, I know about this and have used it		Total
The call number range or ranges for locating LGBTQ+ books on library shelves	36.49%	27	35.14%	26	28.38%	21	74
Subject terms that describe LGBTQ+ terms in the book catalog and/or article databases	18.92%	14	37.84%	28	43.24%	32	74
Streaming video collections that include LGBTQ+ films	18.92%	14	39.19%	29	41.89%	31	74
Library research guides related to LGBTQ+ topics	32.43%	24	33.78%	25	33.78%	25	74
A librarian specializing in Women's/Gender/Sexuality Studies	47.30%	35	36.49%	27	16.22%	12	74

Table 17 Participants were asked about their level of awareness of five library services.

Interview participants were split in their library usage, though no one reported that they had never used a library. Six participants reported using libraries, either physical or online, with some regularity, while four said they either didn't use the library often or hadn't recently.

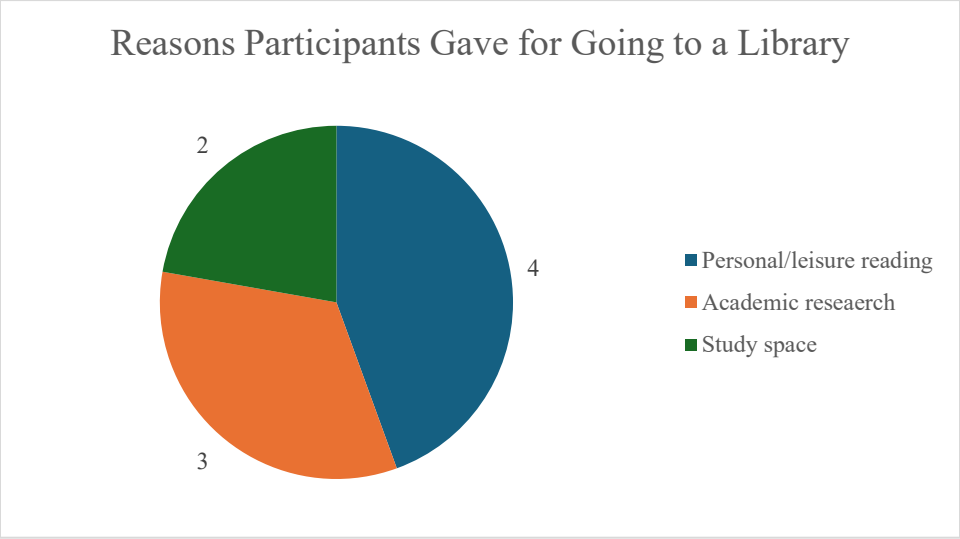

Figure 11 Reasons participants gave for visiting a library.

Four participants regularly used libraries (either physical or online) to access leisure reading materials, while three participants' library usage was geared toward academic research (see Figure 11). Two participants mentioned frequently using Libby, which is a library app that connects users to electronic resources offered by their local library. A third participant had heard about Libby and said she had friends who used it but had never used it herself. Additionally, two participants noted they frequented the library primarily as a place to study.

Several participants recounted having visited the library when they were children but stated they typically don't use it now. One of the participants who had used the library extensively during college said she didn't visit libraries often anymore. Finally, one participant stated she hadn't grown up visiting the library and had never really gotten in the habit.

While most participants reported having used library reference services, no one had used them to satisfy information needs regarding their sexual orientation. Seven participants stated they had visited reference desks, usually in college or graduate school, and two had actually worked at reference desks at universities.[22] Three participants stated they did not or couldn't recall using reference services.

There were several reasons cited for not using libraries. Participant 1 preferred purchasing books over borrowing them stating, "In all honesty it just boils down to I don't trust myself to read something within a deadline and get it back on time. And I don't want to take that resource from another person." Similarly, Participant 4 said, "My reading tends to be very sporadic, so loan systems get difficult." Other participants discussed physical barriers to libraries. For instance, Participant 6 mentioned limited hours at her local library, while Participant 9

[22] One worked in IT at a university library that required IT personnel to work reference shifts, and the other had been a student worker. It is not uncommon for libraries at universities without library programs to have student workers from other programs.

discussed the difficulty of driving to and parking at her current local library. Participant 5 stated, "I feel like I'm definitely more willing to go to a library now that I can walk to it, I just haven't had the opportunity to do that yet."

Several participants also mentioned personal barriers, such as fear. For example, Participant 8 discussed the difficulty of being from a small town where a family member worked at the local library. Participant 2, who regularly uses libraries, stated, "To be honest with you, when I came out I didn't think 'oh I'll go to the library and look it up', I never thought about that. But it is a place you get other resources so why not. I think it goes back to not wanting to be judged or having to explain yourself or making what should be a positive experience [into] something negative."

Overall, participants had either positive or neutral experiences at libraries. Eight participants stated they hadn't had any negative experiences, although three mentioned they would not necessarily have been visible as LBQ women. Of the eight participants without negative experiences, five recounted positive experiences they'd had at libraries. One of these positive experiences came from interacting directly with library staff; Participant 3 stated that library staff had been very accommodating when she was renewing a library card and the information on her card didn't match her ID. Participant 1 mentioned feeling safer as a queer person when various pride flags were on display in the local public library, while Participant 7 said she felt affirmed in her university library due to posters and information about different marginalized communities being on display. Participant 10 recalled finding a brochure on queer books available at the library, which constituted a positive experience for her. Finally, Participant 9 admitted she was biased, stating, "I was one of the kids who would go weekly to the library and come back with a stack of 10 to 12 books and be done with all of them by the next week, so I

have a lot of just really… warm and formative memories of libraries in the first place… So it's kind of hard for me to imagine a place where I don't see… libraries less than positive[ly]." She followed up by saying the most negative experience she had with libraries was conversations around the defunding of libraries, and complications of public funding and space availability in the post-COVID era.

Of the remaining two participants, Participant 4 stated that her experiences with libraries had all been neutral. Only Participant 8 mentioned a negative experience in which she'd been misgendered at the library but had not thought it worth correcting at the time.

Participants had several suggestions for increasing comfort levels in libraries. For participants whose top barrier was physical access due factors such as library hours or distance to the library, increasing ease of access was mentioned as something that would help them, though Participant 6 mentioned being highly aware that decreases in library budgets made increased hours difficult. Participant 2 mentioned the helpfulness of having materials accessible in multiple formats so that people who couldn't necessarily physically visit the library could still read e-books or listen to audiobooks from the library. Connected to using libraries as spaces, Participant 6 mentioned it would be nice if libraries had coffee shops in them.

Most of the suggestions for increasing comfort with the library came down to the idea of knowing it is a safe place, knowing librarians can and will help, and easily seeing LGBTQ+ materials. For instance, Participants 2 and 10 mentioned the idea of having a separate section or permanent (i.e., not just during Pride Month) display area containing LGBTQ+ materials as something that would be helpful. Similarly, Participants 3 and 8 mentioned that it would be nice if libraries had a way to signal their support and ability to help LGBTQ+ patrons. Participant 8 said, "It's something small, but I feel like it would help a lot… if there was a sign that stated…

it's a safe space for LGBTQ people, and we're more than happy to help you find information about LGBTQ stuff if you're interested [in] all this stuff, even if you're questioning [that] kind of thing." Similarly, Participant 3 stated, "Especially for gender identity stuff, being like, yeah, this is very much okay and we know how to help you, when signing up for library cards and renewing library cards especially."

Finally, Participants 1 and 10 mentioned being unclear about what resources are provided by libraries or what libraries are intended for. Participant 10 mentioned that she previously wouldn't have thought about libraries as a place that should have information about being queer, while Participant 1 suggested, "I think if I just had a better understanding of what they could provide…"

Librarians were asked if they could recall a time they'd helped a lesbian, bisexual, or queer woman find information resources related to their sexual identity. Only two librarians could recall having such experiences. Librarian 3 mentioned she'd only had someone approach her for help with a queer subject once, but added, "We don't get a lot of queer people, at least people… You know, they don't openly talk about it or say it… For safety reasons, which is unfortunate." Librarian 4 recalled having teenagers coming into the library looking for LGBTQ+ materials regularly, stating "We all the time had teens that would come in, bisexual, lesbian, questioning, trans teens, looking for both fiction and nonfiction, just to… have something to represent themselves, because a lot of them, their parents weren't supportive at home, and so we were kind of their only outlet for that." Librarian 1, whose library is in an "extremely conservative small town" stated, "I know we have had [LGBTQ+ patrons], women especially, come into the library, but never openly, and never asking for specific things." Similarly, Librarian 2 said, "We are a small college, a small private college, and I feel like… I know I have

students who identify in the community, but I think they're very… They're not going to share that with people on campus." However, she said she did have a student worker who was queer, and she helps her find things regularly.

Regardless of whether or not it had happened in the past, librarians were asked if they felt prepared to help LGBTQ+ women. Responses were mixed. Librarian 1 responded that she didn't necessarily feel prepared, but she knew she had staff who were. Librarian 4 said she felt prepared on a personal level due to her own experiences but didn't feel like she'd been adequately prepared on a professional level. Similarly, Librarian 3 stated she felt like she was probably more prepared than her colleagues and was always ready and willing to learn more. Librarian 2 stated she felt prepared because, while she may not have the materials in her collection, she knew where to find them. Finally, Librarian 5 stated, "I feel like it's just maybe not the kind of thing that people think to approach an academic desk with. But I don't know, I like to think if someone was like 'I'm questioning whether I'm a lesbian, or questioning whether I'm trans' or something like that I would be like yeah, we can find something for you."

All five librarians agreed that more training is needed, either in school or in the workplace. Three librarians mentioned MLS coursework, whether it be having more overall diversity among faculty as well as within the curriculum, having readers' advisory courses, or having courses on diverse collection development. Librarian 1 brought up the necessity of learning non-mainstream resources, including information about local and national resources. She said in her community (and likely in many communities), knowing which churches would be welcoming to LGBTQ+ people would be important information. Librarian 2 discussed the difficulty in finding research related to LGBTQ+ issues and suggested training on how to find articles, particularly open-access articles. Finally, Librarian 3 stated she wished workplaces

required continuing professional development, saying "I wish that… library jobs would require you to do x amount of professional development within the topic of… the queer community… sexism… how women are viewed. I really wish we had that as part of a staple, because everything changes so quickly."

Overall, while librarians pointed to some areas in which libraries successfully provide resources to LBQ women, most of the librarians interviewed did not think libraries were successful. Factors such as where the library is located and what kind of library it is play an important role in successfully providing resources. For example, Librarian 1 stated, "I suspect it really depends on where you are, who you are, how big you are. I think the bigger libraries have a better chance of doing that. I suspect libraries in [nearby state] and other states aren't as fearful as small libraries." She added that her library did have a decent number of LGBTQ+ books, including all but one of the ALA's most challenged books. However, shelf space was an ever-present problem, especially in a small library. Librarian 2 said, "I would say yes [libraries are successful]… especially in terms of digital resources… I feel like that has helped the barrier of… them feeling like they're persecuted for looking at things." Librarian 5 said, "I think there are some librarians intentionally collecting in this area, but also I think…depending on the state, or just whatever else is going on, I'm sure that there could be more happening."

Two librarians said they did not think libraries were successful in serving LBQ women. Librarian 4 said one of the difficult parts of working at a largely vocation-based community college was "we have such a strict budget that it's like pretty much every purchase has to be justified [as] contributing to a course or a subject area," which made it nearly impossible to collect LGBTQ+ material. She also pointed out that when she visited her local public library, even when there were Pride displays, "it's typically more geared towards male and male

relationships." Finally, Librarian 3 said, "I think that libraries love to think they are very inclusive and open and accepting spaces, especially for queer people. But I do think…that it is lacking." She noted, especially under the current administration, but even before, that she has seen libraries start to hide queer-related programs and materials, which tend to garner a lot of protests. Librarian 2 also mentioned the political climate, stating, "I think that's really important for us in red states, not to get political, but…libraries are often the space where they can get information that they need…I know I'm really only talking about academics, but…if children who are questioning need something, they go to the library."

Chapter 6. Discussion

I now turn to two key themes pertaining to both research questions that emerged throughout the research process: lesbian invisibility and the push/pull between visibility, integration, and separation. I then discuss the research questions proposed at the start of this research. Finally, I discuss the demographic differences seen in the results.

6.1 Theme 1: Lesbian Invisibility

A recurring theme throughout this research has been lesbian invisibility. It was present in prior LIS literature, in theoretical debates, and now directly from interview participants. The lack of information resources related to lesbian information needs can be found most prominently in health information and in publishing and/or collections.

Participants discussed the lack of information regarding sex and health in general. Participant 5 said, "It's not as widespreadly talked about, especially…okay, specifically with like sex… just sex ed in general, no one really specifically talks about it, like when it's specifically with two women. Actually, even with two guys its more talked about." She went on to explain,

> There's a lot more specific stuff to do with how when you're attracted to women, it's looked at differently. You know what I'm saying? It takes so…at least for me, it took so long for me to even look at being attracted to women as an option because I never saw it anywhere. And even after I did, I was like maybe I just really want to be their friend…that's one of the things with looking up resources, because I was like what is it supposed to be like and also there's all the stuff about how people view you, how it can be sexualized.

Participant 6 echoed this, stating, "There's crappy rom-coms that are straight…but there's some movies that just seem…particularly objectifying and fetishizing of queer people rather than

telling authentic stories about queer people." Taken together, these statements demonstrate how young women who are working to understand their sexuality are simultaneously exposed to overly sexualized (typically male centered) representations of lesbianism, and at the same time struggle to find actual, helpful information on their sexuality.

Participant 2 spoke in depth about issues she's seen regarding lesbians and health information. An information resource that she wished was widely available was provider directories listing LGBTQ friendly doctors. She stated, "I've had some horrible experiences with obgyn[s] in particular, and that seems to be a common occurrence among some of my friends, and I think a lot of people don't look at sexual health in general, a lot of people don't focus on those that identify as lesbians. And I know at one point there were higher rates of ovarian cancer [among lesbians] because they weren't getting pap smears because they're like 'oh I don't have to go to the gyn[ecologist]', or unfortunately how they were treated." Even in situations and spaces where LGBTQ+ health and relationships are theoretically prioritized, she said this often isn't the case for lesbians, explaining:

> No one, to this day, has ever talked to me about dental dams for example…You look at like a Planned Parenthood,[23] as a whole I feel like even though they do other stuff, they're not really advertising themselves to WLW couples and I feel like we get lost in the shuffle of all the other diseases or focuses and it's constantly overlooked. And it has been, I've been out for almost 20 years and nothing has changed in that space, and I've worked in the medical field, I've worked for the government, and I've worked for the state and it doesn't matter. It's never discussed. I changed that with some people in my current job and we actually did have dental dams available at the Pride event and people

[23] Planned Parenthood is widely regarded as being a top resource for LGBTQ+ sexual health needs.

> were very excited, or were like I've never seen one of those, and just to look at it. They're not readily available, they're super expensive, and no one talks about them. So it's just like once again, I feel like lesbians once again when it comes to health are completely overlooked…Even during Pride Month…or at Pride Fest and Pride events, why isn't [someone] just ensuring that there's something for those individuals, and there's not all gay—regular condoms are great and dandy but again it pushes a whole spectrum of people out of the conversation and we just get pushed aside consistently…And unfortunately…if anything I think it's gotten worse.

Her experiences echo what several librarians discussed regarding the distinct information needs held by LBQ women. As Librarian 2 stated, "They [LBQ women] deal with basically being part of two minorities in one, and so when they're looking for information, they have to make sure that, you know, the information they're trying to find is…how they identify as part of the queer community as well as as a woman. I think it's a very unique perspective in a lot of ways because they're subjected to more limited resources." Similarly, Librarian 3 said, "I think because of the lens of being a woman or presenting as a woman or a female, I think there are certain barriers that definitely exist, which means that there has to be information on that as well. Because of the society that we live in, it's more leaning towards heterosexuality and also men." It is well known that women are woefully underrepresented in medical research,[24] and this only increases when other minority identities are stacked. This creates an information vacuum for queer women in which research doesn't exist, they aren't able to access the information they need, and issues persist and grow. For example, as Participant 2 explained, "People don't understand the amount of addictions, smoking, domestic violence that happens in WLW

[24] For more, see Balch, 2024. "Why we know so little about women's health".

relationships, that is a national problem. All of that is overlooked. Every space that you can think of." Similarly, as Librarian 4 said, "I have read…especially bisexual women but queer women in general, have much higher rates of mental illnesses and eating disorders."

A lack of lesbian representation can also be found when it comes to books. Librarian 4 mentioned that when she saw Pride displays at a library (not the library she worked at), there were typically more books featuring male/male relationships. Librarian 3 discussed the discrepancy between queer fiction and non-fiction books when it comes to the gender (and sexuality) of the author, stating, "I do see a lot of books that are authored by men within the queer community… women, I think, are very underrepresented in terms of authorship….Within the book world, at least from what I'm seeing, I do notice that there are more fiction stories, fiction books that are written by women about queer stories, than there are non-fiction books. Which I think is, again, a little problematic and skewed because I know that there are women within the queer community who I'm sure have experiences and have information that would be helpful to the community in general." This was echoed by Librarian 4 who mentioned, "We did make a Pride display in the [academic library] in June, and I very much struggled to find any books to add to that collection, and I don't think that there was a single one about queer women, bisexual, lesbian, anything like that." This issue is compounded when discussing materials about non-white LBQ women. Participant 5 said, "I think a lot of the work that I've seen… even though historically a lot of queer liberation comes from queer people of color, I think a lot of the stuff that I've searched for before and that has had the biggest seat at the table, especially over the past couple of years, it's just… very culturally white, and there's nothing wrong with that, it's just… there's just a smaller kind of sample to draw from at times, if I'm looking for something

that's particularly reflective of a queer, non-white experience, a queer non-Western experience, even a queer Asian experience."

Luckily, there does seem to be a bright spot when it comes to the existence of lesbian fiction, even if some libraries may not have these materials. Librarian 2 said, "I thankfully have seen a lot more sapphic books recently, which is great, but I feel like… that wasn't really normal until I feel like it got an uptick recently, so that's beautiful." Similarly, Participant 6 stated, "I think it's gotten easier to find lesbian books. I've seen a lot more written over the past five years, and I think especially things like TikTok, I'm on a lot of book Tiktoks and so they're always sharing their recommendations for stuff."

6.2 Theme 2: Push/Pull of Visibility, Integration, and Separation

Another theme that became apparent was the tension over visibility, particularly in terms of integration versus separation of materials. Multiple participants discussed the idea of having a specific section for LGBTQ+ materials in libraries, though they also acknowledged some of the arguments against it. Participant 10 said, "I feel like, if there was a [section] like they had in Barnes & Noble, I mean, some people might say oh, you shouldn't separate it out, as if straight people don't want to read that. But I think if they had a section which was kind of easy to see, that would be giving a good vibe." Librarian 4 stated, "Something I really liked at the public library I worked at was we had a really big collection of stickers for our collection, and so it was like the sci-fi, history, romance, whatever. And so maybe having even more specific stickers because I think especially in an academic [library] where the stacks just go way back, it's just so overwhelming to be scanning spines, so something like having a sticker or something similar to that would be so helpful." When asked if she thought increased visibility of queer books would lead to more pushback from the community, she replied, "Absolutely in a public library,

especially right now. I think you're going to have parents who, even if you're doing this in the adult section, are still going to say 'my kid shouldn't be allowed to see rainbows.'" Librarian 1, who works in a small, conservative town said about commonly challenged books, "We just put them in real quietly" and "they get mostly ignored [by people who would protest the content]."

Unfortunately, Librarian 3 has witnessed libraries removing information to avoid drawing unwanted attention. She said, "[they're] pulling back on programs that they're providing, information that they're providing, where they're providing the information. Most of it's not online, it's physical paper that's hidden in a specific area that may not be as visible to patrons when they come in because they don't want to catch any sort of bullets from either the public itself or the city. And it sucks, because then, if patrons are not seeing it, the patrons who do need it are also not seeing it, so it kind of presents this huge problem."

These anecdotes bring together some of the important tensions present in debates around the visibility of materials. Having a specific display or section of a library dedicated to LGBTQ+ materials could help LGBTQ+ patrons feel more welcome and comfortable, but it could also "other" patrons and the books themselves, suggesting that they're *only* for LGBTQ+ patrons. Labeling books containing queer material could make it easier for queer patrons to find, but it could also prevent closeted teens from reading a book that could otherwise slip under the radar, so to speak, because others would be able to see the label. Unfortunately, increasing the visibility of LGBTQ+ materials to LGBTQ+ patrons means increasing their visibility to potential protestors, and hiding materials (or programs) from protestors means hiding them from the people who need them most.

6.3 RQ1: What are the information needs and behaviors of lesbians and queer women?

Two key information needs emphasized by survey and interview participants are the desire to see themselves represented and to be affirmed. Nearly 80% of survey participants selected "experiences of other LGBTQ+ individuals" as a topic they had sought information about, while 64% selected "dealing with/accepting sexual identity," both of which can be achieved by representation. Additionally, fictional books and fictional movies/television shows were each selected by 76% of participants as information sources they had sought out regarding their sexuality. Fictional material was selected more than any other information source besides LGBTQ+ friends. Representation was mentioned by interview participants as well, particularly casual representation. For example, Participant 10 mentioned it would be nice to see "stories about kids in their school just casually being gay, which is not even the main point of the plot, or something like that." Similarly, Participant 9 discussed a growing desire for stories of "incidental queerness… where that's part of the narrative, but not the core…", saying, "I think I've become much less interested in stories about the oppression of being gay and more stories where someone gets to kill a dragon, and also she's bisexual." Interview participants also discussed the need to understand and accept their sexual orientation/identities, as well as a need for understanding and validation. Participant 4 shared that her biggest information need when she was first exploring her sexual orientation and gender identity was, "I think to a fair degree at that point, that I wasn't alone."

Several of the information topics selected by participants are related to community. From wanting to learn about the experiences of other LGBTQ+ individuals to accepting one's identity and coming out to social gatherings/cultural events and activism, there is a thread of wanting to find a community. The importance of community, particularly queer community, was a recurring

theme throughout the interviews and survey responses. Over 95% of responding survey participants selected "friends—LGBTQ+" as an information source they had sought out with regard to their sexuality. Furthermore, when participants ranked information sources, friends—LGBTQ+ had the lowest (i.e., most helpful) mean. To a lesser extent, survey participants selected "friends—straight" (47%) and "family members" (36%).

The importance of community was discussed by several interview participants. Participant 2 said, "It was a very different time [when I came out] of course, but I had found my people who then helped me with those resources at the time, and then honestly it was probably a lot of the people that helped me get through that, whether it was people I already knew that could help me overcome barriers, whether it was my own family…" Participant 7 explained, "In the very early stages of me realizing, or coming to terms with my identity, I didn't have that many queer friends, or I wasn't in a lot of those spaces…So there was a little bit of a social barrier, obviously people can try to help you and be supportive, but if you're not queer, you know, if you're not gay, you don't really fully understand it…But now throughout my course of high school and even now in college, I feel like that's kind of been resolved as I've met way more people."

Community continues to factor into where participants find information, with many mentioning finding queer media through queer content creators and influencers. While friends and fictional media were the most popular information sources, social media and the internet in general were frequently mentioned. Image/video based social media such as TikTok and Instagram were more popular than text based social media, such as Facebook or X (formerly Twitter), with 71% and 54% of responding participants selecting them as an information source,

respectively. Meanwhile, almost 75% of responding participants selected Internet search engines such as Google.

For many interview participants, search engines and social media were utilized to find queer media. Participant 5 said about seeking LGBTQ+ materials, "I usually come across something, usually on social media if I'm not looking, if I am looking then usually the first thing I do is search it up and usually Reddit is the first thing that pops up and someone will have a list somewhere." Two participants mentioned "BookTok," a corner of TikTok dedicated to books and reading; Participant 6 said she was active on BookTok, and Participant 9 said she didn't use it but got recommendations from friends who did. Participant 6 added, "I think also it's just the influencers that I follow on TikTok, Instagram, stuff like that, they're also exposing me to queer media." Participant 7 said, "I feel like I just utilize social media for everything. I mean, apps like TikTok and Instagram, again, spaces where creators can put out any type of content, and you can specifically search for the content that you're looking for." Similarly, Participant 2 said, "I guess I probably just Google. I Google things a lot. Or I end up going to that person's socials if it's like a celebrity…like, oh this actress, what else is she in?" While participants overall seemed satisfied with using social media and search engines as a primary source of information, Participant 8 did note, "the internet's not always accurate or good in terms of things. So I'm a little…my information's a little skewed and stuff."

As previously discussed, the majority of interview participants (90%) spoke about their information needs changing, either simply over time or by coming out. These changing information needs indicated by my participants echo the findings of Whitt (1993). Whitt discussed how some of her participants gravitated toward fiction as opposed to factual

information after having been out for a longer time, while others became more discerning and interested in specific information rather than anything they could get their hands on.

6.4 RQ2: What role do libraries play in meeting the information needs of lesbians and queer women?

More than half of survey participants reported having used a library to satisfy their information needs. Of the participants who reported using a library, 57% had used both public and academic libraries, 33% had used public only, and 10% had used academic only. However, as previously mentioned, this does not necessarily mean the remaining 44% of participants have never been to a library at all. It is possible some of the participants who selected "no" have visited libraries for other purposes (studying, school research, etc.) besides sexual orientation-related needs. It is likely that the heavy recruitment on a college campus contributed to the high percentage of participants who had used an academic library to meet their information needs. Approximately 40% of participants who used a library reported using it once a month or more, while 26% reported having used them in the past, but not currently. It is worth noting the possibility that some participants may have used library electronic resources such as Libby without realizing it or thinking about it. For instance, Participant 5 initially said she didn't use libraries; however, she meant she didn't physically go to libraries, but she did borrow library e-books.

All interview participants had at least some experience with libraries, either currently or in the past. The interviews gave insight into why participants did or did not use libraries. One interesting theme to emerge was the idea that participants didn't necessarily have a clear idea of what libraries do, or what they offer. Participant 8 said, "If I knew of a place where there was a lot of LGBTQ information, like a library, I would go there. Like, I know the culture center on campus has an LGBTQ library. I've been in the room, but I haven't looked at any of the books.

So I mean…I'm not a big, like, history person." Similarly, Participant 7 stated, "one thing about a library I will note that I feel…if you're trying to search for…like, historical, I guess historical pieces and stuff like that, and finding the specific historical context of situations, I feel the library is useful." Two participants noted either not knowing what the purpose of a library was or not knowing what resources were available through libraries. This was echoed by Librarian 5, who mentioned, "I feel like it's just maybe not the kind of thing that people think to approach an academic desk with." The experiences of these participants suggest there is room for libraries to improve outreach to LBQ women. The participants interviewed were not uncomfortable in libraries, but also they did not necessarily view them as places that could provide information related to their sexual orientation and related information needs.

Given the high percentage of participants who have looked to books and film/television as information sources, it is surprising to see that many are *not* utilizing libraries for their reading needs in particular. (Given the popularity of streaming services, it is less surprising that fewer people may be borrowing movies from libraries. Physical video media is less common, and obtaining streaming video rights can be extremely expensive for libraries.) However, while 122 participants (76% of responses) reported seeking out fiction books, and 78 participants (49% of responses) reported seeking out nonfiction books, only 38 participants (57% of responses) reported having borrowed library e-books or digital films, and 47 participants (70% of responses) reported having borrowed physical items from a library. Part of this discrepancy could be due to the lower response rate of the library questions. While 160 participants responded to the question regarding information sources, only 142 responded to the question asking if they had ever used a library to satisfy their information needs. Of those 142, 63 had never used a library, and of the 79 who *had* used a library, only 67 responded to the question regarding library services. However,

even considering the dwindling responses, it begs the question: where do LBQ women get their books? Why aren't they borrowing materials from libraries more? Interviews provided some insight into this, for example, for some participants, sporadic reading and loan periods led to lower library use. This remains an area that could be explored more fully.

Finally, while it might be expected that LGBTQ+ librarians would be skewed toward feeling more confident in their abilities to help LGBTQ+ patrons, or less likely to see a need for more training, as was cautioned in Siegel et al. (2020), that is not the overall view of the librarians interviewed. Instead, in large part, they identified gaps in their training and confidence, perhaps due to a higher degree of awareness of what is missing.

6.5 Demographic Differences

As mentioned before, lesbians selected LGBTQ+ health information as a topic they were interested in at much higher rates (60%) than other participants, both queer (44%) and bisexual (29%). Lesbian participants also selected counseling/psychological services at a higher rate (39%), particularly much higher than bisexual participants (8%). It is difficult to speculate on these discrepancies in interest. It's possible that lesbians think about health information specifically as an LGBTQ+ topic. Another possibility is that the interest in LGBTQ+ health information is influenced by age more than sexual orientation. There were higher rates of interest in health information among the 35-44 and 45+ age groups (selected by 64% of both groups), as well as by the age unknown group (75%), compared to 18-24 (40%) or 25-34 (38%). Counseling/psychological services were also selected by a higher rate among 45+ and age unknown groups (36% and 42%, respectively) compared to 18-24 (24%), 25-34 (29%), and 35-44 (9%). Since there was also a higher rate of lesbian identity among older age categories, as

well as among the age unknown group[25], it is certainly possible the higher interest in health information is related to age. Regardless, LGBTQ+ women's health is clearly an area that needs further exploration.

The two information sources involving friends are particularly interesting to discuss in terms of participants' sexual orientations. Given that 47% percent of respondents selected "lesbian" as best describing their sexual orientation, followed by 34% "bisexual" (as well as 17% "queer" and 2% "gay"), it is unsurprising that the highest proportion of participants answering the questions follow this pattern. For instance, figure 12 shows the breakdown of participants who answered the question "Which of the following topics related to your sexuality have you sought information about?" For nearly every topic, this remained true: the largest number of respondents were lesbians, followed by bisexuals, then queer.[26] In order to offer comparisons, I have normalized the data, however there is one instance in which looking at the total numbers is particularly interesting.

[25] Twenty percent of lesbian participants were of unknown age, compared to 0% of gay participants and 11% each of bisexual and queer participants.

[26] There were two instances where more queer participants selected a topic than bisexual: counseling/psychological resources (9 queer, 4 bisexual) and family law/general law (3 queer, 2 bisexual). In both cases, lesbians held the highest number of responses overall (26 and 10, respectively).

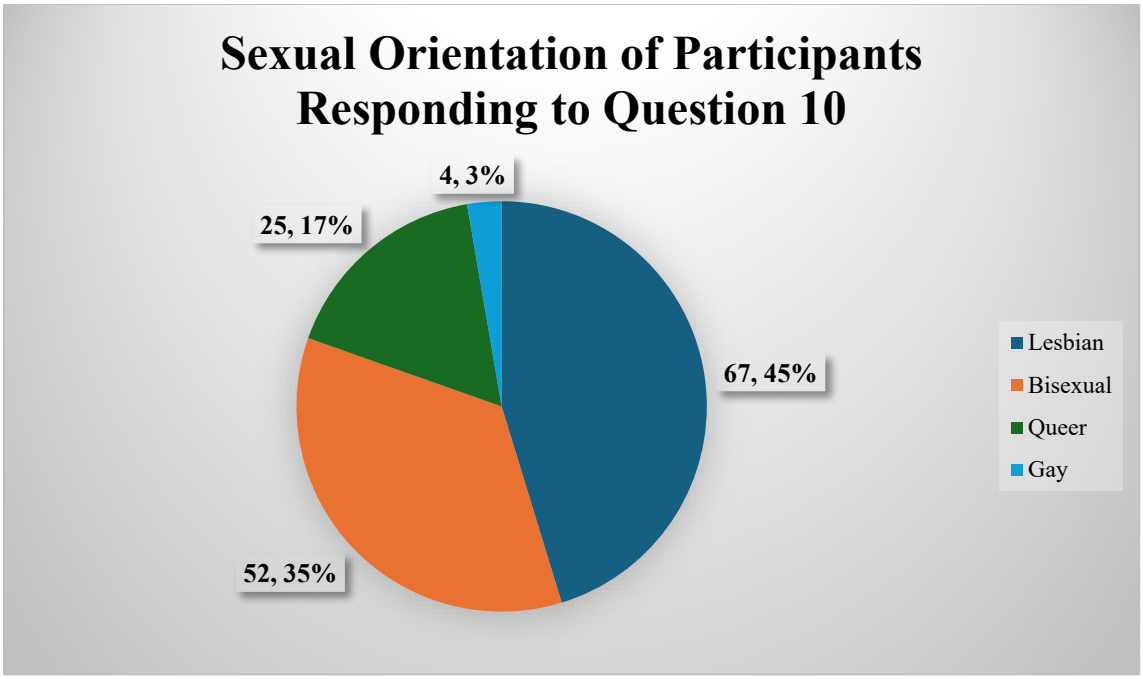

Figure 12 Sexual orientation of participants who responded to the question "Which of the following topics related to your sexuality have you sought information about?"

This pattern was true for information sources as well.[27] Out of the 160 participants who answered the question, 75 were lesbians, 54 were bisexual, 27 were queer, and 4 were gay. There was only one information source where the pattern broke: "Friends (straight)." Of the 75 participants who selected "friends—straight" as an information source, 44% (*n=33)* were bisexual, while 34% (*n=25*) were lesbians. Since, again, more lesbians had answered the question overall, this indicates a major difference in who selected "friends—straight" as an information source. Looked at from a different angle, only 35% of lesbian respondents selected "friends—straight" as opposed to 61% of bisexual respondents, 52% of queer respondents, and 50% of gay respondents. In short, this suggests a key difference in the information behavior of two subsets of LBQ women, lesbians and bisexuals. While "friends—LGBTQ+" was highly selected across the board as an information source (lesbian, 96%; bisexual, 94%; queer, 100%,

[27] Again, there were two information sources with more queer participants than bisexual: clergy or other religious authority (2 queer, 0 bisexual) and other (1 queer, 0 bisexual).

gay, 75%), “friends—straight” is drastically reduced with lesbians, dropping well below 50%, despite continuing to be an information source for half or more of the other three groups.

Unlike higher interests in LGBTQ+ health information, it seems less likely that LGBTQ+ vs. straight friends as an information source is affected by the age of participants. LGBTQ+ friends was selected as an information source at a high rate among all age groups, though it was selected by 100% of participants in the 35-44 and 45+ age categories. Straight friends were selected at a relatively similar rate among the 18-24, 25-34, and 45+ age categories (50%, 54%, and 55%, respectively), and at a lower rate among the 35-44 and age unknown categories (36% and 29%, respectively).

This leads to the question of why straight friends are selected at such a lower rate by lesbians than bisexual or queer women. It is possible that lesbians form more insular communities and have fewer friends who are straight. It is also possible (and perhaps more likely) that lesbians may not have fewer straight friends but are less likely to view those friends as an information source for LGBTQ+ topics. It is conceivable that bisexual and queer women may relate to straight women more easily than lesbians do and thus be more likely to view them at an information source.

Interestingly, while there was some variation in technology-based information sources based on age, it did not necessarily follow the pattern one might expect. For instance, 73% of 45+ participants selected Internet searches, compared to 63% of 25-34 and 45% of 35–44-year-olds. Meanwhile, 81% of 18–24-year-olds selected Internet searches. The same is true for both image/video based social media and text based social media; participants in the 45+ category selected them as information sources at a higher rate than any group besides 18–24-year-olds. AI services such as ChatGPT were actually selected at a higher rate by the 25-34 (8%) and 35-44

(9%) age categories than the 18-24 age category (4%), though it was not selected by any participants in the 45+ category. Unsurprisingly, newspapers/magazines were selected at a much higher rate by the 45+ age category (73%) than any other; in fact, the next highest was 25-34 with only 17%. This suggests that participants in the 45+ age group are holding on to older information sources while also embracing more recent sources.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

I started this research with the goal of filling a gap in LIS research on LGBTQ+ patrons by identifying the information needs and behavior of lesbians, bisexual, and queer women, and how libraries meet those needs. I found that LBQ women most commonly look to their friends (LGBTQ+) as an information source, though fictional media (books and films/television), Internet searches, and image/video-based social media are all also frequently used information sources. The most popular information topics pertained to the experiences of other LGBTQ+ individuals, dating, social events, marginalization, and identity acceptance. The use and importance of libraries varied widely among participants. I found evidence that information behaviors and needs, as well as library usage, may differ between age groups and sexual orientations. I also described two key themes in my research: lesbian invisibility and the push/pull between visibility, integration, and separation. I conclude by offering implications of this research, both practical and broader, limitations, and future directions.

7.1 Implications

7.1.1 Practical Implications

In the introduction to her book *Epistemology of the Closet,* Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2008, originally published 1990) presents the following seven axioms[28] for gay and lesbian studies. After each axiom, I provide a brief explanation and, when applicable, offer a suggestion for how it might be extended to the research presented here.

[28] An axiom is "a statement accepted as true as the basis for argument or inference; an established rule or principle or a self-evident truth; or a maxim widely accepted on its intrinsic merit" (Merriam-Webster).

1. “People are different from each other” (Sedgwick, 2008, p. 22). This statement is self-explanatory; people have different feelings and opinions about what their sexuality means and how it impacts their lives. This extends to library usage as well.
2. “The study of sexuality is not coextensive with the study of gender; correspondingly, anti-homophobic enquiry is not coextensive with feminist inquiry. But we can’t know in advance how they will be different” (p. 27). Sexuality and gender are different concepts, and we don’t know until we start studying how they may differ in a particular context. Sedgwick is referring to gay and lesbian studies vs. feminist studies; however, this idea can be extended to gay and lesbian studies vs. trans studies. While there may be overlap, there must be consideration for each individually.
3. “There can’t be an a priori decision about how far it will make sense to conceptualize lesbian and gay male identities together. Or separately” (p. 36). Historically, sexuality studies have focused on gay male identities while lesbian identities were ignored. Sedgwick argues for avoiding pre-conceived notions of how the experiences of gay men and lesbians are similar or different. Taken further, it is worth questioning whether a single study can claim to look into “LGBTQ+” services, as this encompasses 5+ identities with sometimes similar, sometimes different needs.
4. “The immemorial, seemingly ritualized debates on nature versus nurture take place against a very unstable background of tacit assumptions and fantasies about both nurture and nature” (p. 40). Essentially, Sedgwick is arguing that debates about the origins of non-heterosexuality do not have a stable background.

5. “The historical search for a Great Paradigm Shift may obscure the present conditions of sexual identity” (p. 44). Sedgwick is warning against becoming too tangled in historical theory to the point of losing focus on the current study.
6. “The relation of gay studies to debates on the literary canon is, and had best be, tortuous” (p. 48). Sometimes left out of anthologized versions of “Axiomatics,” this refers to the twisted connections between the “literary canon” and gay studies.
7. “The paths of allo-identification are likely to be strange and recalcitrant. So are the paths of auto-identification” (p. 59). Sedgwick’s final axiom is a complicated way of saying that the ways we identify ourselves and others are weird and do not lend themselves to authority.

While Sedgwick’s axioms range from the perhaps obvious (people are different) to the more esoteric (“the relation of gay studies to debates on the literary canon is, and had best be, tortuous”), they provide useful guidance for ensuring that researchers and librarians are on the same page. In the spirit of Sedgwick’s axioms, I have developed three axioms for moving forward with research into LIS research and LBQ women.

1) **The information needs of LBQ women are not identical to the needs of heterosexual women, nor are they identical to the needs of members of the LGBTQ+ community who are not women.** Even today, even in queer-friendly spaces, LBQ women continue to report feeling invisible and ignored.
2) **Libraries and librarians are operating against and within a cis/heteronormative system**, or as others have called it, a heteropatriarchy (Banerjea et al., 2019). Heterosexual, cisgender, and male identities in particular are privileged and seen as “the default” in a cis/heteronormative or heteropatriarchy. In the words of one

librarian participant, “There tends to be this sentiment that in the library community that we’re neutral. Which is not true at all, because if we were neutral, we wouldn’t be providing any information at all. Providing information to everyone regardless of their class or race or nationality is radical in and of itself, and is not a neutral stance.”

3) **Libraries are not adequately meeting the needs of LBQ women**. Previous research has shown that many LGBTQ+ people in general do not feel libraries are able to meet their information needs, either due to prejudice or a lack of knowledge. While many participants did have positive or neutral experiences with libraries, there were several who didn’t consider libraries a place that could meet their needs.

7.1.2 Broader Implications

There remains the longstanding question of whether new forms of technology will replace libraries as information sources. While the internet and social media are certainly key information sources being utilized by LBQ women, they still rank behind fiction books and fiction movies/television, and text-based social media (such as Facebook or Twitter/X) ranks behind nonfiction books as well. At this time, AI services ranked second to last (besides the “other” write-in option). While it is certainly possible this could change, I do not think AI will replace libraries or other information sources for LBQ women, for a couple of reasons.

Recent research has found increasingly negative feelings toward artificial intelligence among Gen Z. A Gallup survey published in April 2026 found that feelings of excitement and hopefulness toward AI decreased from 36% to 22% and 27% to 18%, respectively, while feelings of anger and anxiety increased from 22% to 31% and 41% to 42%, respectively (Gallup, 2026). Additionally, a study of teen and young adult perceptions of generative AI found that LGBTQ+ participants had a significantly more negative view of generative AI than cisgender/straight

participants. When asked if they believed the impact of generative AI on their life in the next ten years would be negative or positive, 28% of LGBTQ+ respondents said mostly negative, compared to 17% of cisgender/straight respondents. Conversely, 18% of cisgender/straight respondents said mostly positive, compared to only 9% of LGBTQ respondents (Common Sense Media et al., 2024).

While the youngest demographic did have more participants who said they had not used a library than those who had (51% to 49%), it must again be noted the question was specifically referring to using libraries to satisfy an information need related to their sexual orientation. It is possible some LBQ women may seek out information on the internet first and later be more comfortable using a library. (Library usage also increased with length of time the participant had been out).

Finally, the frequency of library usage is much higher among the LBQ women surveyed than US averages. A survey of library card holders utilizing library services in the United States found that only 19% of respondents visited the library monthly or more for any of the activities listed (physical space to spend time, accessing computers or other technology, programs and events for adults, programs and events for children), and only 24% checked out any type of book (physical, electronic, or audio) monthly or more (YouGov, 2025a; 2025b). In contrast, 40% of the respondents in this study visited the library monthly or more.

Though it was not a question I set out to answer, this research contributes to debates around identity in gender and sexuality studies. My research shows that lesbian identity is alive and thriving, something that has been questioned, downplayed, and dismissed both within gender studies spaces, online, and in media at large.

7.2 Limitations

There are a few limitations to this research, some of which evolved out of attempts to overcome limitations of prior research. A common problem with using interviewing as a method in this type of research is that the sample can be skewed toward people who are more out and can prevent researchers from gathering data on people who may be more closeted, and arguably even more in need of information services. Additionally, some research has been done by recruiting only from LGBTQ+ groups, which also skews the sample. This was discussed by Whitt, who wrote "Creelman and Harris' research was limited by a small sample (50 women) and by the fact that those women interviewed were already 'out' to the extent that they agreed to be personally interviewed by the researchers (1993, p. 272), which meant "that women had to be comfortable enough with their sexuality to discuss it with researchers" (p. 276). Due to her anonymous survey approach, Whitt's study was able to "represent[s] a larger population of women and, more importantly, a population that varies greatly in terms of their openness about their lesbianism" (p. 272). By following the anonymous survey approach and advertising in both queer and entirely neutral locations (e.g., bulletin boards in academic buildings on campus), I hoped to hear from a wider variety of participants than some researchers have in the past, including those who may be unwilling to participate in interviews or focus groups due to fears of being outed. The survey was relatively successful in having participants who had a wide range of "how out" they were, and how long they had been out. Out of the 160 participants to take the survey, six signed up to be interviewed and completed the interview.[29] While there is a wide range of possible reasons for

[29] A further six survey participants expressed interest in being interviewed, but either did not follow up on scheduling the interview (4) or scheduled but did not show up for the interview (2). Similarly, a further four librarians expressed interest in interviews, but either did not follow up (2) or scheduled but did not show up for the interview (2).

why participants may not have been interested in being interviewed, it is certainly plausible that some participants were willing to take the survey due to the anonymity.

This is particularly likely when considering the second limitation of this research, which is the state of LGBTQ+ issues in the United States at this time. This has an effect on researchers, librarians, and in the everyday lives of LGBTQ+ individuals. In speaking informally to other researchers studying similar topics, it is clear that the current political climate of the United States is making this type of research difficult. Anecdotally, several LBQ women have mentioned that it is a "scary time" to participate in this type of research. This was mitigated somewhat by snowball sampling; people who knew me and could vouch for my integrity shared the survey with people who knew and trusted them. While the interview sample size (of LBQ women as well as librarians) could have been larger, participants still gave a range of responses that led to fruitful analysis. It was also difficult to recruit librarians to participate in interviews, which is understandable when considering headlines about librarians being disciplined for things like refusing to remove LGBTQ+ content from their libraries. The librarians who did participate were likely motivated due to their personal connection with the topic. Another limitation is the incompleteness of many survey responses, especially with demographics. This makes it particularly difficult to compare results across different demographics. However, the benefits of including incomplete surveys outweigh the limits, particularly during a time when it may be more difficult to get participation and open up an avenue for future exploration.

7.3 Future Directions

This research has aimed to help fill the gap in the literature on LGBTQ+ LIS literature by focusing on an underrepresented group: lesbian, bisexual, and queer women. Through surveying and interviewing information users and librarians, I have begun to uncover the information needs

and behaviors of lesbian, bisexual, and queer women, and how libraries fit into meeting those needs. It is clear that libraries have great potential to be an important resource for LBQ women, but it is equally clear that there is much room for improvement, both in the content, services, and environment they provide, as well as in awareness of what they provide. However, there is still work to be done.

Given the exploratory nature of this research, there are several possibilities for future research. One possibility is looking more closely at how information needs and behaviors change with age, which both the survey and interview indicate happens. As previously discussed, multiple interview participants recounted differences in their experiences as teenagers or young adults versus their experiences as adults. Additionally, the survey results suggest differences in information sources, information topics, and library usage by age. However, in the current research these differences were difficult to analyze due to small sample sizes, as well as surveys from participants who had not indicated their age. In several instances, the responses from the age unknown group could have led to an entirely different result. (Recall, for example, the discussion on technology-based information sources in Chapter 6.5).

Another possibility for future directions is looking more in-depth at LBQ women in rural areas, since the majority of respondents here came from urban counties. The experiences of LBQ women in rural areas are likely quite different, particularly with regard to access to resources.

Finally, there remain the questions that arose in Chapter 6. Where do LBQ women get their books? Why are they not borrowing materials from libraries more? Why were straight friends considered a resource at a much higher rate by bisexual and queer women than by lesbians? These are all topics and questions that could be further explored in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Q1. You are being asked to participate in the research project "Information Behaviors and the Role of Libraries in Meeting the Information Needs of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Women" (IRB #27006). Your requested participation is in the form of a survey that will take approximately 15 minutes. Your participation is voluntary and uncompensated. There is a risk you may be uncomfortable while answering questions. You can skip any questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer. There is also a risk someone from outside the study team could get access to your research information from this study. We will take every measure possible to mitigate this risk, including using the "anonymize results" feature in the survey software, which prevents the collection of your IP address, location, and contact information. We don't think you will have any personal benefits from taking part in this study, but we hope to learn things that will help other people in the future. If you have any questions regarding the research, you can contact Megan Vladoiu at mvladoiu@iu.edu Additionally, you can contact Indiana University's Institutional Review Board at irb@iu.edu.

Please indicate if you consent to take part in this research.

- ○ I consent to take part in this survey
- ○ I do not consent to take part in this survey [survey ends if selected]

Q2 What is your gender identity?

- ○ Cisgender Woman
- ○ Non-binary
- ○ Transgender Woman
- ○ Cisgender Man [survey ends if selected]
- ○ Transgender Man [survey ends if selected]
- ○ Other _____

Q3 Which term best describes your sexual orientation?

- ○ Lesbian
- ○ Gay
- ○ Bisexual

- ○ Queer
- ○ Heterosexual [survey ends if selected]

Q4 What term do you prefer to use to self describe?

_____

Q5 How long have you identified with your sexual orientation?

- ○ Less than one year
- ○ Between one year and five years
- ○ More than five years

Q6 Do you consider yourself to be "out" regarding your sexual orientation?

- ○ Never
- ○ Sometimes
- ○ About half the time
- ○ Most of the time
- ○ Always

Q7 How long have you been out?

- ○ Less than a year
- ○ Between one and five years
- ○ More than five years
- ○ Not applicable

Q8 Which of the following information sources have you sought out with regard to your sexuality?

- ☐ Academic Journal Articles
- ☐ Books--Fiction
- ☐ Books--Nonfiction
- ☐ Clergy or Other Religious Authority
- ☐ Counselor or Therapist
- ☐ Family Members
- ☐ Movies or Television Shows (Fictional)
- ☐ Movies or Television Shows (Documentary/Nonfiction)

- [ ] Friends (LGBTQ+)
- [ ] Friends (straight)
- [ ] Text Based Social Media (i.e., Twitter/Bluesky/Facebook)
- [ ] Image/Video Based Social Media (i.e., Instagram/TikTok/Youtube)
- [ ] Internet Searches (i.e., Google)
- [ ] AI Services (i.e., ChatGPT)
- [ ] Newspapers or magazines
- [ ] Other (please specify)

Q9 Referring to question #11, rank the information sources you selected from most helpful (1) to least helpful.

Q10 Which of the following topics related to your sexuality have you sought information about?

- [ ] Dealing with/accepting sexual identity
- [ ] Coming out
- [ ] Counseling/psychological resources
- [ ] Social, political, and legal marginalization
- [ ] Employment discrimination

- [ ] LGBTQ+ friendly colleges
- [ ] LGBTQ+ friendly employers/businesses
- [ ] Family law (divorce, child custody), general law
- [ ] Coping with LGBTQ+ based discrimination
- [ ] Dealing with crimes and hatred against LGBTQ+
- [ ] LGBTQ+ and religion
- [ ] LGBTQ+ health information
- [ ] Dating
- [ ] Forming relationships and families
- [ ] Appearance and styling
- [ ] Experiences of other LGBTQ+ individuals
- [ ] Finding support groups, associations, conferences
- [ ] Activism
- [ ] Social gatherings, cultural events
- [ ] Financial issues

☐ Other _____

Q11 Referring to question #12, rank the information topics you selected from most important (1) to least important.

Q12 Have you ever used a public or academic library to satisfy your information needs?

- ○ No [skip to next section if selected]
- ○ Yes-public only
- ○ Yes-academic only
- ○ Yes-both public and academic

Q13 How often do you use a public or academic library to satisfy your information needs?

- ○ Once a week or more
- ○ More than once a month
- ○ Once a month
- ○ Every few months
- ○ Once a year
- ○ I have used the library in the past, but don't anymore
- ○ Other _____

Q14 How comfortable do you feel using a library to satisfy your information needs?

- ○ Extremely uncomfortable
- ○ Somewhat uncomfortable
- ○ Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
- ○ Somewhat comfortable
- ○ Extremely comfortable

Q15 Have you ever felt discriminated against when using the library?

- ○ Never
- ○ Sometimes
- ○ About half the time
- ○ Most of the time
- ○ Always

Q16 Have you ever used the following library services?

- [ ] Attended a library event related to your sexuality (e.g., a film screening, book talk, reading, etc.)
- [ ] Asked a question at an in-person reference desk
- [ ] Asked a question through a virtual reference service (e.g., via online chat, email, etc.)
- [ ] Checked out a physical book or film related to your sexuality
- [ ] Borrowed an e-book or digital film related to your sexuality

Q17 How satisfied are you with your library experiences?

- ○ Extremely dissatisfied
- ○ Somewhat dissatisfied
- ○ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- ○ Somewhat satisfied
- ○ Extremely satisfied
- ○ I don't use the library

Q18 How aware are you of the following library resources?

	I have never heard of it (1)	I've heard of this but am not sure how to use it / locate it (2)	Yes, I know about this and have used it (3)
The call number range or ranges for locating LGBTQ+ books on library shelves (1)	○	○	○
Subject terms that describe LGBTQ+ terms in the book catalog and/or article databases (2)	○	○	○
Streaming video collections that include LGBTQ+ films (3)	○	○	○
Library research guides related to LGBTQ+ topics (4)	○	○	○
A librarian specializing in Women's/Gender/Sexuality Studies (5)	○	○	○

Q19 Which category below includes your age?

- ○ 18-24
- ○ 25-34
- ○ 35-44
- ○ 45-54
- ○ 55+

Q20 What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

- ○ Less than high school --no diploma, no GED, or alternative credential
- ○ High school graduate --with diploma, GED, or alternative credential
- ○ Some college credit, no degree
- ○ Undergraduate or trade school certificate (for example: AA, AS, BA, BS)

Graduate or professional degree (for example: MA, MS, PHD, JD, MD)

Q21 What is your race or ethnicity? (Please select all that apply)[30]

- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native

- [ ] Middle Eastern or North African
- [ ] Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- [ ] White
- [ ] Other, please specify

Q22 What state is your permanent residence?

[dropdown menu]

Q23 In which county in [selected state] do you live?

_____

[30] Asian was meant to be listed as an option and had been included on previous drafts. I apologize for the fact that it was not included in the final published version of the survey.

Q24 Would you be interested in participating in an interview?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No [end survey if selected]

Q25 To get more information about interviews, sign up at the link below

- ○ [Link]

Appendix B: Information User Interview Protocol

1) Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?
2) Do you ever use a library? Why or why not?
3) Do you use the reference desk and/or online reference services of a library? Why or why not?
4) Have you had any good or bad experiences with a library due to your sexual orientation or identity?
5) Do you think you have or have had in the past any special information needs directly related to your sexual orientation or sexual identity? What are they?
6) When seeking out LGBTQ+ materials (books, magazines, films, etc.), where do you go?
7) If you are out, do you think coming out changed your information needs? How so?
8) Do you feel disadvantaged when it comes to finding information because of your sexual orientation or identity? What barriers have you faced when it comes to finding information?
9) What could libraries do to make you more comfortable using them to meet your information needs?
10) Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Appendix C Librarian Interview Protocol

1) Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?
2) What is your role in your library? (management, reference, collection development, etc.)
3) Would you be comfortable sharing your sexual orientation? (This will not effect eligibility to participate.)
4) Can you recall an experience where you helped a lesbian, bisexual, or queer woman find information resources related to their identity? (e.g., readers' advisory, health information, legal information, etc.)
5) Do you think lesbian, bisexual, and queer women patrons have any special information needs, distinct from those of heterosexual or other LGBTQ+ patrons?
6) In general, do you think libraries (not necessarily your library) are successful in providing information resources to lesbian, bisexual, and queer women?
7) Do you feel like you're personally prepared to help this population? How so (or not)?
8) What would help you be more prepared? (LIS school, on the job training, etc.)
9) Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Curriculum Vitae

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EDUCATION

PhD Indiana University, Doctor of Philosophy in Information Science 2026
Gender Studies Doctoral Minor
Dissertation: "We Just Get Pushed Aside": Information Behaviors and the Role of Libraries in Meeting the Information Needs of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Women

MLS Indiana University, Bloomington, Master of Library Science 2021

BA Indiana University, Bloomington 2018
BA in Anthropology with High Distinction
BA in Spanish with High Distinction

HONORS AND AWARDS

- **Luddy Outstanding Teaching Award** 2023-26
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- **E. Lingle Craig Fellowship** 2023
  Wells Library, Indiana University
- **ILS Doctoral Research Forum Runner Up Award** 2023
  Indiana University
- **Luddy Outstanding Service Award** 2023
  Indiana University
- **Jose Blakeley PhD Summer Research Award** 2022
  Indiana University
- **Robert A. Oppliger Scholarship** 2021-22
  Wells Library, Indiana University

PUBLICATIONS

Vladoiu, M. (2025). Politeness in proactive library chat reference. RUSQ: A Journal of Reference and User Experience, 60(2), 89-102. https://doi.org/10.5860/rusq.60.2.8378

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Vladoiu, M. (2021). A space for stories: Libraries serving child and young adult refugees. *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference, iConference 2021,* March 17, 2021.

BOOK REVIEWS

Journal of Gender Studies

The golden girls: tales from the lanai (2026).

It's all in the delivery: Pregnancy in American film and television comedy (2025).

Closures: Heterosexuality and the American sitcom (2025).

Normporn: Queer viewers and the TV that soothes us (2024).

Lesbian potentiality and feminist media in the 1970s (2023).

PRESENTATIONS

Vladoiu, M. Politeness in proactive chat reference. *Poster presented at the Indiana University Information and Library Science (ILS) Doctoral Poster Forum 2024.* March 2024.

Vladoiu, M. National libraries digitization projects as an indicator of cultural heritage values. *Poster presented at the 19th International Conference, iConference 2024*. April 2024.

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TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor on Record, Indiana University

- **ILS-Z550 Information Institutions and Their Management** (Fall 2024, Spring/Fall 2025, Spring/Fall 2026)
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LIBRARY EXPERIENCE

Indiana University, Bloomington (2019-2026)

- **Part Time Reference Desk Coordinator**, Scholars' Commons Reference Desk in Wells Library (Jan. 2023-2026)
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SERVICE

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