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The Quest for LGBTIQ EBooks

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Introduction

An increasing percentage of LGBTIQ information seekers desire online resources over print. The rise of EBooks—cheap, convenient, and available online—have led a significant number of LGBTIQ readers to abandon libraries and bookstores for Amazon and other online EBook providers. Meanwhile, public, academic, and school librarians have been slow to assess the user needs and format preferences of LGBTIQ patrons, and continue to focus on the acquisition of print LGBTIQ books and access to these materials. While more publishers are providing EBook versions of LGBTIQ titles, and authors are giving permission to digitize "classic" LGBTIQ works, public library EBook collections such as Overdrive, as well as academic EBook collections made available through EBSCOHost, Electronic Book Library (EBL), JSTOR, Project MUSE, and ProQuest ebrary do not include the number of critical LGBTIQ titles that they should. This chapter will address the challenges of LGBTIQ EBook acquisitions, the dire need for quality LGBTIQ EBooks, and challenges to global LGBTIQ EBook access.

Definition of an LGBTIQ Book

In this book chapter, the author defines an LGBTIQ book as one that addresses LGBTIQ populations and issues. An LGBTIQ author most likely writes LGBTIQ books, but this is not always the case. LGBTIQ fiction will have at least one main character that identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, questioning, gender-nonconforming, gender variant, or gender

queer. Most LGBTIQ books, even those published by "mainstream" publishers, are advertised to an LGBTIQ audience. An LGBTIQ book may be print or electronic; the author will specify the book format as needed throughout the chapter.

LGBTIQ Readers in the Age of EBooks

In the 21st century, librarians continue to write about library patrons seeking LGBTIQ information in the stacks to promote LGBTIQ collection development (Garnar 2000; Fikar 2004; Downey 2005; Mathson and Hancks 2006; Lupien 2007; Adler 2010; Schaller 2011; Campbell Naidoo 2013; Chapman 2013; Hughes-Hassell, Overberg, and Harris 2013; GLBT Youth 2014; Yilmaz 2014). Since the Internet and EBooks have become ubiquitous, however, libraries are seeing a decrease in print book circulation (Martell 2008). Younger generations of LGBTIQ readers may be contributing to this statistic, even though national studies have shown that Millennials and Generation Z are the most likely generations to read for leisure, and actually read more books than those of older generations (Pew Internet & American Life Project 2012; Pew Research Center 2013).

Almost no studies exist of LGBTIQ readers or LGBTIQ reading habits in the age of EBooks. In 2011, Michigan LGBT romance writer Jessica Freely conducted an informal Survey Monkey survey of gay romance readers through the Goodreads M/M [male/male] Romance group to determine how and where they look for books (Freely 2013). While she received over 1,500 responses from the group, more than half of these readers identified as heterosexual. This survey, while of interest to writers and publishers of gay romance, does not include any questions about gay romance readers seeking out books from their libraries, nor does it include any questions about where these readers acquire print books. Freely made the assumption that these readers only purchase EBooks from online sources. Freely also did not provide data specific to the LGBTIQ gay romance readers who responded to the survey.

In 2012, librarian Rachel Wexelbaum, with the support of Lambda Literary Foundation (LLF), wanted to find out what type of books today's LGBTIQ readers were reading, how they found out about books, and where they would go to acquire books (Abrams 2013). She created a Survey Monkey survey, which LLF posted on their website and online magazine. Wexelbaum also sent the link to those Facebook groups and listservs for LGBTIQ readers and librarians that she could identify. From these sources, Wexelbaum received 1,213 responses from people ages 18-65+. In response to their sexual orientation and gender identity, 96% chose to identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, asexual, or

"other"; 1.4% identified as straight, and 2.5% preferred not to answer. As the number of LGBTIQ responses is statistically significant, Wexelbaum will call her survey "the LGBTIQ Reading Habit Survey" in this chapter.

Book Format Preferences of LGBTIQ Readers

Of 1,213 LGBTIQ Reading Habit Survey respondents, 51% stated that they read EBooks for pleasure. Less than four per cent of EBook readers in this survey, however, read EBooks exclusively. The top two reasons given for liking EBooks were "They are inexpensive" and "They are easy to find". Readers were much less likely to respond "They are easy to read" for EBooks, which was their top reason for print book preference. Older generations of readers are more likely to have tablets or EReaders than younger generations (Pew Research Center 2014). This also proved to be the case in the LGBTIQ Reading Habit Survey. Those who owned tablets or EReaders were more likely to read EBooks, but did not necessarily prefer them to print books. Readers of EBooks were also heavy readers of print books.

Genre Preferences of LGBTIQ Readers

When asked how many EBooks they read are LGBT related, 41% responded "less than half" and 28% responded "more than half". Those who indicated that half or less of their EBook leisure reading consisted of LGBT EBooks were prompted to provide reasons for not reading LGBT EBooks. Readers most frequently responded "Quality of LGBT EBooks is not good" (65%) and "I can't find any" (40%). Surprisingly, 60% of the LGBT EBook readers surveyed stated that, when it came to LGBT-specific leisure reading, format availability was not important. For leisure reading in general, nearly 90% of LGBTIQ readers stated that content was more important to them than format.

LGBTIQ readers identified "fiction", "sci-fi and fantasy", and "non-fiction" for their top three choices of leisure reading in both formats. At the same time, LGBTIQ readers identified a wider range of genres that they enjoyed in EBook format over print. LGBTIQ readers were more likely to read mystery, romance, erotica, and porn in EBook format than print.

How LGBTIQ Readers Find Out About Books and EBooks

LGBTIQ readers find out about books and EBooks from different sources. LGBTIQ readers are more likely to find out about print books for leisure

readings from friends, either through face to face conversation or social media, while they are more likely to find out about EBooks through websites and online retailers than from people they know. Librarians were more likely to recommend print books for leisure reading (23%) than EBooks (12%).

Where LGBTIQ Readers Acquire Books and EBooks

LGBTIQ EBook readers were most likely to acquire books in both formats from Amazon. The fact that nearly 50% of respondents owned an Amazon Kindle to read EBooks might have influenced readers' EBook purchasing choices. LGBTIQ EBook readers were more likely to visit the library to acquire print books than EBooks, though, especially those in the younger age groups.

Demand for LGBTIQ EBooks

As more readers purchase tablets, EReaders, or SmartPhones, the demand for EBooks in any subject will increase. As youth are coming out and transitioning at earlier ages, and often have mobile devices or access to a laptop or personal computer, they or their parents would appreciate easily accessible LGBTIQ materials. As advances in LGBTIQ civil rights result in changes to our existing legal, educational, health, law enforcement, and religious systems, students and practitioners would also appreciate easily accessible LGBTIQ materials. More colleges and universities are offering LGBTIQ-themed classes or programs; instructors are becoming more sensitive to the financial needs and format preferences of their students, and search for affordable course materials available in electronic format.

The highest demand for LGBTIQ EBooks comes from populations that do not have access to LGBTIQ print materials. People living in places where print books cost more than EBooks, or far away from book stores and libraries, appreciate any online provider of LGBTIQ EBooks. Readers of LGBTIQ EBooks perceive that reading on a device provides a level of safety and privacy which they might not have if they were reading an LGBTIQ print book in public. Even those readers of LGBTIQ content who do not enjoy reading EBooks will fight for the rights of those without safe spaces to have access to LGBTIQ EBooks.

While most LGBTIQ reading habit survey participants indicated that they were not likely to read romance, erotica or porn for pleasure, they were more likely to read these genres in EBook format (Rosman 2012). As of September 2014, more than 90% of the top 100 paid Amazon Kindle gay and lesbian

bestsellers fall in the romance or erotica category. The #1 title on the list—*Double Full* by Kindle Alexander—is ranked #158 in the Amazon Best Sellers Rank for Paid Kindle Store EBooks; quite an accomplishment when nearly 2.3 million EBook titles exist in the Kindle store at the time of this writing. *Fingersmith* by Sarah Waters, the only non-genre award-winning fiction title in the top 100 paid Amazon Kindle gay and lesbian bestsellers, ranked at #33 on that list, but #3,566 in the Amazon Best Sellers Rank for Paid Kindle Store EBooks.

LGBTIQ Books, EBooks and Libraries

While an increasing percentage of librarians have embraced EBooks for leisure reading and share them through LibraryThing, GoodReads, and other forms of social media, they continue to write scholarly and professional journal articles about the availability of LGBTIQ *print* books. The number of LGBTIQ fiction and non-fiction titles published annually has steadily increased. LGBTIQ organizations such as the American Libraries Association GLBT Round Table, Lambda Literary Foundation, Polari, and the Publishing Triangle review and promote LGBTIQ fiction and non-fiction, and give annual awards to the best in each genre. These organizations each have Facebook pages and Twitter feeds for librarians to follow. LGBTIQ books are also reviewed in mainstream library review sources such as *Choice*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *Library Journal*. No self-respecting librarian can feign ignorance as to where to locate LGBTIQ readers' advisories or recommended LGBTIQ titles in any genre. The underrepresentation of LGBTIQ titles in public, academic, and K-12 EBook collections, however, may lead patrons searching for LGBTIQ EBooks to search elsewhere.

Challenges to LGBTIQ EBook acquisitions for libraries

Cost

EBook titles licensed for libraries often cost more than print titles (Besen and Kirby 2012). Libraries with small budgets may not invest as heavily in expensive EBook titles, especially academic libraries whose mission is to develop collections that support general undergraduate curricula and not specialized research. Libraries that have invested in patron-driven or demand-driven acquisitions systems will sometimes put stop-gaps in place to prohibit the automatic purchase of EBooks that cost more than a prescribed amount, or do not meet the collection development criteria of the library.

In non-English speaking countries, libraries will subscribe to EBook collections where translations of titles are provided in that country's language. If the language of that country is spoken only in that nation, the cost of that subscription will increase. For countries that do not have significant native language LGBTIQ publications, the acquisition of translated versions of LGBTIQ EBooks could take a huge bite out of dwindling acquisitions budgets.

Lack of coverage in subscription-based EBook collections

American public libraries often subscribe to the Overdrive EBook collection. As of September 2014, Overdrive includes titles from over 10,000 publishers worldwide (Overdrive, n.d.). In 2012 Overdrive introduced a patron-driven acquisitions service so that patrons could select EBook titles to read which were not included in the original Overdrive collection. Because of this, each public library across the United States will vary widely in their LGBTIQ EBook holdings. Public libraries slow to adopt the patron-driven acquisitions service for their Overdrive collection may turn LGBTIQ EBook readers away, as the original Overdrive EBook collection included no LGBTIQ materials.

Academic library EBook collections may be more likely to have LGBTIQ EBooks than the public library. EBSCOHost, ProQuest ebrary, Electronic Book Library, JSTOR and Project MUSE are slowly improving their LGBTIQ EBook holdings. As of September 2014, EBooks compose more than half of the items in EBSCOHost's LGBT Life with Full Text Database; they are academic non-fiction titles primarily in humanities, social sciences, education, social work, and law. Only twenty five percent of these LGBTIQ EBooks provided in LGBT Life were published in the 21st century, which means that librarians would still need to supplement this collection with other titles. While there are some classic LGBT Studies titles included among the older EBooks, and LGBT Life has focused on diversity, most of the EBooks in this collection are not necessarily considered core resources or examples of great scholarship. Most colleges and universities do not include LGBT Life in their EBSCOHost databases at all as they may not be sure if usage would justify the additional cost.

K-12 school media centers are beginning to invest in EBooks. As of September 2014, EBSCOHost has not added LGBTIQ content to their K-12 EBook collections. The new K-12 EBook-on-demand service, BrainHive, includes only two LGBTIQ EBooks in their selection. This forces children and young adults either to search the stacks of their school libraries for LGBTIQ content (which could put them at risk for bullying) or to abandon their school library to search elsewhere for content that they can read in a private space. Filtering software may also affect K-12 student access to LGBT EBooks.

LGBTIQ authors often seek out independent or self-publishing options for their books (Boyd 2002; Pilkington 2011; Vinjamuri 2012). Historically, LGBTIQ titles from small presses or those that are self-published are less likely to be ordered by libraries than those from large mainstream publishers. Self-published LGBTIQ EBooks, while wildly popular through the Amazon Kindle store, will not appear in EBook collections or patron-driven acquisitions systems designed for libraries.

Lack of electronic version of the title

When new book titles are published, not all authors and publishers put out a print and electronic version at the same time. Older titles also do not always come in an EBook version that libraries could add to their EBook platforms. At one point, these titles were not even available as EBooks through Amazon. In a 2010 study of award winning LGBTIQ fiction and non-fiction titles available in Kindle EBook format, Rachel Wexelbaum (2011) discovered that less than 33% of award-winning LGBTIQ titles were available as Kindle EBooks, and the likelihood of EBook availability decreased with age of the book. Wexelbaum informed the Lambda Literary Foundation about this issue, who communicated with Amazon, publishers, and writers about this problem. Over time, more authors and publishers are working together to re-release Kindle EBook versions of LGBTIQ classics for current and future generations. While some of these EBook titles may also be made available for Overdrive, almost none of them are available for academic EBook platforms.

ACCESS CHALLENGES FOR PATRONS

Where is the library?

The older someone is, the less likely they are to go to the library to borrow books (Pew Research Center 2013). At the same time, the younger someone is, the less likely they are to know that their library has EBooks (Pew Research Center 2012). This means that older people interested in LGBTIQ books will seek out other sources for such materials, and younger people may consider their library to look for LGBTIQ materials but will not know where to start.

Ignorance of library catalog / discovery tools / search strategies

According to the LGBTIQ reading habit survey, most LGBTIQ readers do not read as many LGBTIQ EBooks as they may like because they either cannot find them or do not perceive them as good quality. If they assume that their library may not have LGBTIQ materials in the first place or are afraid to ask, they

will either have to try searching for these EBooks through the library's online catalog or through the search engines of online booksellers. As of September 2014, if someone searching for LGBTIQ books does not know an exact title or author, a keyword search for "gay" in a library catalog may retrieve a multitude of results but will also include books with authors by the name "Gay". An Amazon Kindle store search for "gay" will retrieve gay romance and erotica titles which might not even appear on their gay and lesbian bestseller list. For this reason, it is no wonder that LGBTIQ readers perceive that LGBTIQ books are not as good as "mainstream" books.

Technical challenges

People who wish to read EBooks from their library may face some frustrations in doing so. First, procedures to access and download EBooks from library platforms involve several steps, and differ from device to device (ebrary, n.d.; EBSCO 2014; Farkas 2011; "Transferring an EBSCOhost e-book to an Apple iOS or Google Android device", n.d.). Often people must upload several apps on their tablet or SmartPhone in order to read EBooks from different sources.

To this day, Amazon Kindles will not support EBooks copy-protected using Adobe Digital Editions. Amazon Kindle owners still cannot access academic titles from EBSCOHost, ebrary, EBL, Project MUSE or JSTOR. Kindle Fire tablet owners, however, can upload Blue Fire Reader and access EBook content from those academic library platforms (EBSCO 2014; ebrary, n.d.; Ebook Library 2013).

Last but not least, libraries and EBook aggregators have made little headway in negotiating interlibrary loans for EBooks (Farkas 2011; Vaccaro 2014). Even if libraries within a consortium all subscribe to the same EBook platform, each library has its own contract with the vendor, as well as its own circulation system. In order to access an EBook from an academic library catalog from off campus, a patron must log into the system using their unique user ID and password issued to them by the academic institution. Those not affiliated with the institution will not have access to another library's EBooks.

Even if libraries have patron-driven acquisitions set up to enhance their EBook collections, academic librarians may pre-select content for their patrons to review based on collection development criteria, cost, and curricular needs. In the case of LGBT materials, librarians often self-censor their selections and may select very few LGBT titles or none at all (Downey 2013). Not all academic librarians will select the same range of content in their subject areas, and each library within a consortium will have different EBook holdings. This proves most frustrating for patrons using the all-powerful general discovery tools on their library websites. The discovery tools will retrieve all print books and EBooks within a consortium

or library system, but the patron will only be able to access EBooks that their library owns or has permission to access. In the case of LGBTIQ EBooks, this means that patrons may have far less access to LGBTIQ materials through their library systems than they did before the age of EBooks.

Future Research and Recommendations

Public, academic, and school libraries must conduct more user studies of their LGBTIQA patrons in order to determine their LGBTIQ print and EBook needs. It is quite possible that these readers are locating LGBTIQ books elsewhere and not often finding "the good ones". If this is the case, and if libraries put in the effort to select award-winning and well-reviewed LGBTIQ titles, then librarians must promote their LGBTIQ collections as well as patron-driven acquisitions systems through multiple face-to-face and online fora to improve connections with their users. At the same time, librarians, publishers, and writers should meet with Amazon representatives to discuss their algorithms for LGBTIQ book searches, and how they affect reader perceptions of LGBTIQ books as a whole. Last but not least, LGBTIQ readers still want to read print books; conduct careful circulation analyses of these titles and compare to your library's LGBTIQ EBook holdings before weeding!

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