

Information-seeking behaviour of LGBTQ health professionals: New data to inform inclusive practice

Martin Morris

Schulich Library, McGill University
martin.morris@mcgill.ca

K.R. Roberto

Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
kroberto@illinois.edu



Copyright © 2014 by Martin Morris and K.R. Roberto. This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>

Abstract:

While the literature contains various studies into the information needs and information-seeking behaviour of LGBTQ-identified library patrons, there is only one which examines the specific information needs of LGBTQ health professionals and their use of librarians. This current research project aims to fill this gap in the literature. The authors report the results and subsequent analysis of an international web-based survey of LGBTQ health professionals, with additional data gathered from semi-structured follow-up interviews.

Keywords: LGBTQ, health professionals, library use

While the literature contains various studies into the information needs and information-seeking behaviour of LGBTQ-identified library patrons (Beiriger and Jackson, 2007; Schaller, 2011), there is only one (Fikar and Keith, 2004) which examines the specific information needs of LGBTQ health professionals and their use of librarians. This current research project aims to fill this gap in the literature. The authors report the results and subsequent analysis of an international web-based survey of LGBTQ health professionals, with additional data gathered from semi-structured follow-up interviews.

Methods

A non-random sample of LGBTQ health professionals was selected through the assistance of representative organisations, notices placed in relevant professional publications, and through

social media. Respondents completed a web-based survey of 28 questions, building on the 2004 study with additional questions.

Respondents were asked to assess the difficulty of finding LGBTQ-related health information, personal preference for consulting with a medical librarian who may or may not be LGBTQ-identified, and comfort with various formats of reference transactions. Additional questions addressed the existence of LGBTQ information needs in general and perceived changes in meeting these needs over the past ten years. A sample of respondents was selected for semi-structured follow-up interviews via email and the results cross-coded to identify common themes. A total of 123 responses were received, of which approximately two-thirds identified as gay or lesbian; over 10% identified as transgender. Respondents came primarily from the US and Canada, and worked in a wide variety of fields, including mental health, family medicine, and public health.

Results

Despite radically changed perceptions of LGBTQ people within many societies over recent years, the results of this research are consistent with the 2004 study, finding that LGBTQ health professionals continue to have distinct information needs and information-seeking behaviours.

Of particular interest in this study are:

- Over 75% of respondents clearly indicated that they believe LGBTQ health professionals to have distinct information needs, including transgender health, advances in HIV treatment, and LGBTQ mental health.
- LGBTQ users were concerned that non-LGBTQ librarians would be less familiar with their information needs, and that they would need to be “educated”.
- Most respondents indicated a belief that their information needs would ideally be met through an LGBTQ librarian or, if not available, through specific training for librarians in LGBTQ health information.
- While use of social networking has exploded since 2004, online chat was not widely seen as an attractive alternative way of contacting a librarian by respondents despite possible concerns over privacy or personal feelings.

Conclusions

While the results of this research address a specific population, they can be extrapolated to many other types of library and to their LGBTQ users. Survey responses demonstrate the central importance of a welcoming and accessible library space and of knowledgeable librarians to whom LGBTQ users can relate. The value of LGBTQ visibility in library work is also demonstrated.

This presentation will also examine common challenges to providing access to resources and will consider possibilities for promoting LGBTQ-inclusive collections and library work which aligns with community needs.

References

- Beiriger, A., & Jackson, R. M. (2007). An assessment of the information needs of transgender communities in Portland, Oregon. *Public Library Quarterly*, 26(1/2), 45-60.
- Fikar, C. R., & Keith, L. (2004). Information needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered health care professionals: results of an Internet survey. *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, 92(1), 56- 65.

Schaller, S. (2011). Information needs of LGBTQ college students. *Libri: International Journal of Libraries & Information Services*, 61(2), 100-115.