

Queers Online: LGBT Digital Practices in Libraries, Archives, and Museums. RACHEL WEXELBAUM, ed. Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2015. 239 pp. ISBN 978-1-936117-79-6.

Queers Online: LGBT Digital Practices in Libraries, Archives, and Museums is a collection of 15 essays that address the digital practices of librarians, archivists, museum curators, and information seekers around LGBTIQ¹ resources, content, and information. Issues that relate to this main theme include the importance of online resources for LGBTIQ people and communities, the challenges of archiving and preserving born-digital materials, the digitization of physical objects within gay and lesbian archives, and the legal and ethical issues inherent in LGBTIQ digital collections. *Queers Online* is the first book edited by Rachel Wexelbaum, a librarian at Saint Cloud State University in Saint Cloud, Minnesota, whose research and professional pursuits have focused on LGBTIQ information resources in libraries.

Queers Online fills a notable gap in the literature on the management of resources and information for and by LGBTIQ individuals in the digital age. Although there is a substantial body of queer/LGBTIQ-focused work in the fields of archives and library and information science,² *Queers Online* is the first book that focuses specifically on the digital opportunities, practices, and roadblocks experienced by librarians and archivists who work with LGBTIQ information and people. The compact book addresses a diverse range of issues, offering an accessible introduction to the subject as well as substantial detail on a number of specific projects, and recommendations for best practices in a variety of contexts.

The first section, “Queering the Online Realm,” introduces a wide range of somewhat disparate explorations of the central topic. Kevin Powell’s “Preserving the ‘Nexus of Publics’: A Case for Collecting LGBT Digital Spaces” explains the importance of queer digital spaces for many young people coming to terms with their identity and starting to access community. He expresses concern that the critical online public spaces into which he came out are being lost, as both archivists and contributors to those online spaces have neglected to preserve their content. The topics addressed here set up important foundations for the subsequent chapters and establish what is at stake for LGBTIQ communities.

- 1 The language used to describe the communities that are the focus of this book is constantly evolving. In this review, I follow Wexelbaum’s choice to use “LGBTIQ,” which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer, as an umbrella category alongside the more specific identity terms that each author uses.
- 2 Ellen Greenblatt, ed., *Serving LGBTIQ Library and Archives Users: Essays on Outreach, Service, Collections and Access* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011); *Archivaria* 68 (Fall 2009), Special Section on Queer Archives: 119–294.

In “Pornographic Website as Public History Archive,” an anonymous contributor makes an ambitious case for considering the value of Spanking Central, a pornographic website for male/male spanking videos, as a public history archive. This chapter potentially raises more questions than it answers around the ways in which subscribers and performers of the website actually engage with and relate to the material, the troubles of relying on a pornographic website as a source of oral testimony for sex workers, and the issue of preservation. Nonetheless, it makes a compelling case for broadening our understanding of what constitutes a public history archive and invites further exploration of similar sites from a public history perspective. This chapter is the only one in the book to directly address pornography despite its prominence both in the queer online realm and in the physical holdings of LGBTIQ archives.³ Unfortunately, *Queers Online* misses the opportunity to address the dearth of work on pornography in literature of the information professions more substantially.

Jane Sandberg’s “Organizing the Transgender Internet: Web Directories and Envisioning Inclusive Digital Spaces” is one of several chapters of this book that will serve as a useful primer for practitioners in the information professions who may have limited knowledge about the specific information needs of LGBTIQ people. “Organizing the Transgender Internet” is an accessible yet comprehensive introduction for anyone who wants to provide online information services to trans people. Sandberg reviews the (relatively scant) literature on the information needs of transgender people⁴ and outlines the ways in which trans communities have searched for and collated online resources since the early days of the Internet. She examines how features of the Internet, such as search engines, naming practices, and web filters, can create a hostile environment for transgender people and propagate racism and “transmisogyny,” a term that refers to violence, discrimination, and fetishization directed specifically at transgender women. Literature on the needs of transgender people and the barriers they face is sparse in library and archives, and Sandberg’s chapter is a welcome addition.

3 Work on pornography and archives proliferates elsewhere; see, for example, Tim Dean, Steven Ruszczycky, and David Squires, eds., *Porn Archives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

4 See John H. Otto, “Information Instruction for Female-to-Male Transsexuals” (2005), accessed 31 August 2016, http://www.jotto.info/FTM/info_for_ftm.pdf; K. Fisher, “It’s Not Monopoly: Gender Role Explorations in Online Environments,” in *Serving LGBTIQ Library and Archives Users: Essays on Outreach, Service, Collections and Access*, ed. Ellen Greenblatt (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011), 51–53; and Angie Beiriger and Rose M. Jackson, “An Assessment of the Information Needs of Transgender Communities in Portland, Oregon,” *Public Library Quarterly* 26, no. 1–2 (2007): 45–60.

“Queering Wikipedia” rounds out the section, reviewing various individuals and projects working to provide more substantial and reliable Wikipedia coverage of LGBTIQ topics and to correct the bias of Wikipedia, which is the result of its primary authorship: largely young, white, straight cisgender men from the global north.

Section 2, “Transitioning from Print to Digital in LGBT Archives,” is the most cohesive portion of *Queers Online*, and its chapters likely have the broadest appeal for archivists at smaller or community-run archives embarking upon digitization projects, regardless of whether they contain records on LGBTIQ people or issues.

Shawn(ta) D. Smith-Cruz gives a comprehensive and rich overview of the digitization practices at the Lesbian Herstory Archives in “Tape-by-Tape: Digital Practice and Cataloguing Rituals at the Lesbian Herstory Archives,” tracing the archives’ history and the ways in which its community-oriented founding principles have informed its digital and online policies. Interviews with volunteer “archivettes” Saskia Scheffer and Rachel Corbman offer a lively portrait of the LHS as well as technical specifics of the digital projects they supervise.

Rebecka Sheffield and Kate Ziemann’s “Privacy, Context & Pride: The Management of Digital Photographs in a Queer Archives” provides an excellent critical view of the challenges of digitizing photographs at the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA). This chapter is an honest and attentive overview of the roadblocks that a community and volunteer-run LGBT archives faces in attempting to meet the demand for digital and online material, which include inconsistent cataloguing, difficulties identifying creators and subjects of photographs, new Canadian copyright laws, and concerns about outing individuals. Sheffield and Ziemann conclude with a strong set of recommendations for the CLGA that may also be useful for other organizations looking to develop digitization policies.

Graham Willett and Steve Wright expand on the ethical and legal issues involved in creating digital histories of social movements in “Copyright, Copywrong, and Ethics: Digitising Records of the Australian Gay and Lesbian Movements from 1973.” This chapter, similar to Sheffield and Ziemann’s, offers no easy answers but highlights essential considerations of the tension between the desire for visibility and access and the necessity of respecting the creators and subjects of LGBTIQ archival materials.

Section 3, “Nuts and Bolts of Queer Digitization Projects,” presents the stories of three LGBTIQ web archives projects. Sally Johnson and Michael Otten discuss their project “Open Up!,” an effort to digitize and publicize materials relating to the history of LGBTIQ emancipation in eastern, central, and southeastern Europe. This chapter is instructive for anyone embarking on a digital archive project – Johnson and Otten emphasize the critical, expensive, and time-consuming issue of copyright, as well as more general challenges around financial and time resources.

Laura E. Uglean Jackson's "Documenting an Aftermath: The Matthew Shepard Web Archive" discusses the opportunities and limitations of using web crawlers to archive Internet content about the murder of Matthew Shepard in 1998, elaborating more specifically on the challenges of preserving queer web spaces, identified by Powell in the opening chapter. In this case, archiving web pages on the anniversary of the event in 2008 allowed the Matthew Shepard Archive to acquire a much broader variety of perspectives than its original collection of homophobic news coverage had. At the same time, the costs associated with that project were significant and the material obtained was not complete. The broader challenge of selecting, cataloguing, and storing LGBTIQ-related content acquired by web crawlers is an area for further inquiry.

The Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Religious Archives Network differs from the two projects outlined above in that it is not a content repository in itself; rather, it acts as an "information clearing house" (p. 181) that connects the digitized personal archives of religious LGBT people from archives around the United States and helps individuals preserve and archive their own records. LGBT-RAN is an example of one way in which digital archival resources can be centralized and promoted to a specific audience.

The final section of the book, "Still Not Totally Out: Continuing Obstacles to Queer Resource Access," both chapters of which are written by Wexelbaum, is highly relevant reading for librarians looking to improve their services and resources for LGBTIQ information seekers. "Censorship of Online LGBTIQ Content in Libraries," a discussion of the practices and standards of libraries that often make them a poor resource for people looking for LGBTIQ content, is not a new contribution to the field,⁵ but the issues are worth revisiting given the deepening digital divide and continued reliance of the most marginalized populations on libraries as primary sources of information. "The Search for LGBTIQ EBooks" reports on Wexelbaum's recent research about the reading practices and preferences of LGBTIQ people who use e-readers. Her study goes a long way to illuminate the opportunities and barriers that LGBTIQ people experience when trying to read high-quality fiction and non-fiction e-books on LGBTIQ-related topics. She also notes some challenges that libraries face in acquiring LGBTIQ e-books and suggests potential solutions. This chapter contains important insights into the new domain of e-books, the implications of which are not yet known, and identifies an important field for further study. Wexelbaum notes, importantly, that the highest demand for

5 David Brian Holt, "LGBTIQ Teens – Plugged In and Unfiltered: How Internet Filtering Impairs Construction of Online Communities, Identity Formation, and Access to Health Information," in *Serving LGBTIQ Library and Archives Users: Essays on Outreach, Service, Collections and Access*, ed. Ellen Greenblatt (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011), 266–76.

LGBTIQ e-books comes from populations that have poor access to LGBTIQ print books owing to lack of local library resources or safety and privacy concerns (p. 218).

As Wexelbaum acknowledges in her introduction and conclusion, a volume like *Queers Online* can only provide “a mere snapshot of existing projects, and a hint of what could come in the future” (p. 2). Despite the difficulties of addressing a subject that propagates such sprawling and divergent concerns, *Queers Online* offers professionals and scholars in archives and libraries an accessible and engaging look at the challenges and opportunities faced by LGBTIQ information seekers and providers in the digital age. The book delivers a lucid assessment of the situation as it stands, a detailed look at the work currently being done, and recommendations for best practices that are broadly applicable and, in many cases, urgently needed.

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Unarrested Archives: Case Studies in Twentieth-Century Canadian Women’s Authorship. LINDA M. MORRA. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014. ix, 244 pp. ISBN 978-1-4426-2642-3.

In her introduction, Linda M. Morra states that “*Unarrested Archives* is in part about archives, specifically Canadian women authors’ literary records housed both in and beyond official institutions” (p. 3). The book is divided into five case studies, sandwiched between an introduction and an excellent but all too short conclusion. By arranging the text in an interesting crescendo of chronology and experience, beginning with well-known performer and author E. Pauline Johnson and ending with the internationally recognized author and activist M. NourbeSe Philip, Morra provides us with a thorough and fascinating history of Canadian women authors’ lives, the experience of women authors in Canada, and their varied yet similar experiences in relation to their archives.

Morra describes arrested archives as being held in-house and privately, such as those of M. NourbeSe Philip, while unarrested archives, such as those of Jane Rule, have been turned over or surrendered to a public institution. Morra uses this lens of “arrested” and “unarrested” archives to examine each writer’s case study. While Morra’s interesting premise of “arrested” and “unarrested” archives piqued this reader’s interest, it ultimately left many stones unturned: the reader would benefit from a more fulsome explanation of the concepts of “arrested” and “unarrested” archives as most are not likely familiar with them. This ambitious work perhaps attempted too many topics at once, at least for an archivally focused reader. Many in the archival profession are starved for