Inclusivity of Queer Symbology in Discoverable Fields of Archival Metadata

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Abstract

Minority communities such as the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, two-spirit, asexual, plus (LGBTQ2IA+) community develop a coded language or symbology to identify allies (Braquet, 2019). This research's literature review contends the importance of uncovering archival items of the LGBTQ2IA+ community. However, the archival content description does not account for LGBTQ2IA+ symbology in the searchable metadata fields. This neglect prevents access to materials critical to LGBTQ2IA+ researchers. This research aims to identify how LGBTQ2IA+ researchers have discovered archival materials containing LGBTQ2IA+and how much they believe access to archival materials containing potential LGBTQ2IA+ symbology would improve LGBTQ2IA+ research.

The primary aim of this research is to assess how researchers discover archival materials containing LGBTQ2I+ symbolism quantitatively. The secondary aim of this research is to quantitatively qualify the potential inclusion of LGBTQ2I+ symbolism in the archival content description or a discoverable metadata field. This research will provide data for future research into improving access to archival material associated with minority communities worldwide.

Topic Under Investigation

While working at the University of Oregon's Knight Library as Music Research Specialist, one of my duties was working with the Historic Sheet Music Collection. Part of my role included finding duplicates to weed out of the collection. One day, I chanced upon an archival sleeve with two items inside. Immediately, I began to assess the differences between the two items shown below in Image A and Image B. I noticed LGBTQI2A+ symbology and coding in *Image B* as opposed to the complete lack of it in *Image A*. As someone who has identified as Queer for twenty-five years and an LGBTQI2A+ researcher, I am well-versed in LGBTQ2IA+ symbolism.

Image A

Image B
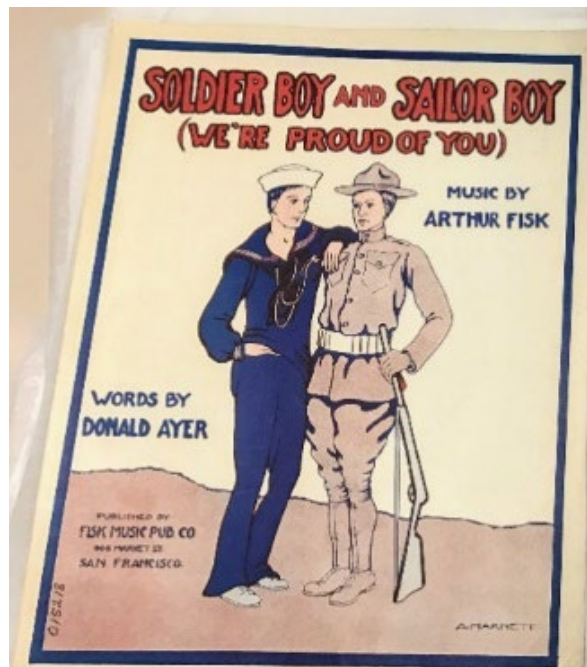
The archival sleeve was listed in the database as having two items, but no distinction was made between the two items. The items shared the accession number (015218), but there was no

indication in the metadata to determine how the items differed. The only way to know the difference was to open the archival sleeve and inspect the items physically. The first difference I noticed between the two items was the cover art. *Image B* portrays the soldier and sailor with qualities associated with gay males at the time. These qualities are symbolic and expressed through posture, physical contact, clothing appearance, and the flag's removal for a rifle held in a questionable grip of the outside hand. I contend that *Image B* uses LGBTQ2IA+ symbolism in an effort to appeal to the LGBTQ2IA+ community. Ramirez & Sterzing's article, "Coming Out in Camouflage," discusses the active recruitment of gay men through propaganda (2017). These two items could be critical to LGBTQ2IA+ research.

When I was first tasked with analyzing the collection for pieces to be digitized in a grant-funded project, I discussed looking for LGBTQ2IA+ material in this collection. After browsing the Historical Sheet Music Collections, I could not identify a single item that indicated LGBTQ2IA+ influence. When I spoke to my supervisor about searching for LGBTQ2IA+ items, she said it would be unlikely I would find any LGBTQ2IA+ material. However, as my work continued, I discovered more items with potential LGBTQI2A+ symbology. With each discovery, I wondered how would LGBTQ2IA+ symbolism would be classified. The small collection housed at the University of Oregon holds the item that could very well be critical to research, yet how would a researcher even know it exists?

The accidental discovery in the archival sleeve changed an untapped potential for LGBTQI2A+ research. Improved access to items with potential LGBTQ2IA+ symbolism through discoverable metadata in the archival content description will also benefit researchers of other underrepresented groups with a historical precedent of symbolism.

Research Purpose Statement

Including potential LGBTQ2IA+ symbolism through discoverable metadata in archival content descriptions will improve the inclusivity of LGBTQ2IA+ materials. The LGBTQ2IA+ community has historically used symbolism to create visibility in overt and secret ways (Roberto, 2011). An example of LGBTQ2IA+ symbolism is men wearing a green carnation on their lapels in the late 1900s. The green carnation became a symbol in the LGBTQ2IA+ community because of Oscar Wilde (Beckson, 2000). Creating access to resources with these symbols is crucial to LGBTQ2IA+ research. The current content description methods do not include LGBTQ2IA+ symbolism, thereby neglecting entire swaths of potential LGBTQ2IA+ archival material.

This research aims to help increase access to resources that contain symbols relevant to the LGBTQ2IA+ community, understand the role of LGBTQ2IA+ people in history, and identify ways the archives can create better visibility and inclusion of the LGBTQ2IA+ community and other marginalized groups communities. I aim to investigate how materials with LGBTQ2IA+ symbolism have been discovered and their classification and cataloging. This research will benefit beyond LGBTQ2IA+ scholarship as symbology is present in most marginalized communities. By increasing access to resources containing symbolism, researchers will have greater access to new resources. The value of this research will help increase knowledge of the LGBTQ2IA+ community's past and potentially identify new research subjects.

Theoretical or Philosophical Perspective

At the heart of this research project is Critical Queer Theory. Critical theories recognize that traditional research paradigms give an incomplete view of social behavior. Critical Queer Theory further acknowledges that society is unequal, and the LGBTQ2IA+ community has not been represented in research studies. Critical Queer Theory allows researchers to deconstruct commitments to objectivity and neutrality. This research project will seek items that support the narrative that history is not solely of and by heterosexuals.

This research will use a quantitative exploratory survey method to evaluate how archival materials containing LGBTQI2A+ symbology have been discovered and the potential impact on LGBTQ2A+ research. Critical Queer Theory follows social constructivist developments in social and cultural phenomena such as popular music. The Historic Sheet Music Collection represents a significant element in Queer History, yet a lack of accurate metadata representations of LGBTQ2IA+ material remains undiscovered and largely undiscoverable.

This research will collect datasets from LGBTQI2A+ researchers assessing how they have discovered archival material containing LGBTQ2A+ symbology and how they feel a discoverable metadata field for LGBTQI2A+ will impact future research. While this research paper uses Critical Queer Theory and explores the inclusion of LGBTQ2IA+ symbolism in discoverable metadata, it is hoped that this research can be applied to other underrepresented groups.

Literature Review

The LGBTQ2IA+ community has developed an intricate array of symbols to identify one another and build community. Foucault said, "There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate *discourses* (Foucault, 1990, p. 27)." Archival materials that contain LGBTQ2IA+ symbology are integral to the inclusive practices and aid in the storytelling process of the LGBTQ2IA+community (Roberto, 2011; Sedgwick, 2008). The Library of Congress Subject Headings are archaic and part of the systemic oppression of marginalized communities (Drabinski, 2013; Taylor, 1993). Creating better access to resources that contain LGBTQ2IA+ symbology will improve the understanding and historical perspective of the LGBTQ2IA+ community. The library information sciences community must continue to find ways to be inclusive and better serve the LGBTQ2IA+ community. Ewing (2019) explores the current classification system of the LGBTQ2IA+ community and concludes that the community needs reliable information from safe and trusted resources. This research explores how the inclusion of LGBTQ2IA+ symbols in the content description will have an immense impact on writing the untold stories of the LGBTQ2IA+ community.

The LGBTQ2IA+community has used many words or terms as codes to help identify others in their community. As LGBTQ2IA+ teens growing up in a conservative suburb, we used *family* to identify other LGBTQ2IA+ people. This term was also used extensively in military settings where revealing one's sexuality was career-ending (Ramirez & Sterzing, 2017). Theatrical stages saw censorship battles played out through symbolism and codes meant to be understood by those in touch with the LGBTQ2IA+ community (Beckson, 2000). Oscar Wilde famously wore a green carnation to symbolize his proclivity toward non-heteronormative

behaviors. If a researcher were looking into LGBTQ2IA+ history, finding cover art, textual mention, or imagery of a green carnation or *family* would drastically impact their research.

This research will significantly impact the LGBTQ2IA+ community and other marginalized communities by answering Drucker's call to dismantle "harmful library classifications" and promote better inclusion of marginalized communities (2017, p. 209). Stories that emerge through symbolism are stories of strength and resilience that are integral to history (Ramirez & Sterzing, 2017). Through quantitative methods, this research seeks to incorporate social justice principles and address how archival content description fails marginalized communities.

This research will explore how to include LGBTQ2IA+ symbology has been discovered by researchers through a citation survey and a survey of LGBTQ2IA+ researchers. While the inclusion of LGBTQ2IA+ symbology on a large scale is impossible, changes locally in smaller or specialized collections are possible. The creation of *Sexual Nomenclature* at the Kinsey Institute demonstrates how the efforts of a small collection can make a more significant impact (Drucker, 2017).

The first step in improving access to archival items containing LGBTQ2IA+ symbology is assessing how LGBTQ2IA+ researchers discovered sources with LGBTQ2IA+ symbolism. This research will provide data for future research into improving access to archival material associated with minority communities worldwide. This research aims to quantitatively assess how researchers discover archival materials containing LGBTQ2I+ symbolism and determine the potential impact inclusion of LGBTQ2I+ symbolism in the archival content description.

Research Questions or Hypotheses

There has been an increased interest in sexuality studies in the past decade. This has led to gaps in research and representation surfacing. Archives must be more proactive in representing underrepresented groups. Researchers have found and used archival items containing LGBTQI2A+ symbology, the reference list of this paper is just a small sampling of researchers using archives in their research. How researchers find archival material containing LGBTQI2A+ symbology is not known. This research aims to create datasets for future research to improve access to archival items containing LGBTQI2A+ symbolism tucked away in an archive closet.

This research's primary question is how archival items containing LGBTQI2A+ symbology have been discovered in existing research. The primary objective of this research is to assess how researchers discover archival materials containing LGBTQ2IA+ symbolism quantitatively. The second objective is to explore and quantitatively determine the potential impact of including LGBTQ2IA+ symbolism in the archival content description.

Design and Methods of Data Collection

This research will incorporate a nonexperimental exploratory survey using a quantitative correlational practice. This approach will focus on collecting data and exploring concepts. This research design will be an excellent fit for this proposal because it will generate a large dataset helpful to researchers. Exploratory survey research is suitable for reaching many researchers from around the globe and is a great way to explore relationships between factors. Exploratory surveys are designed to increase familiarity with a phenomenon, such as research incorporating

archival material containing LGBTQ2IA+ symbology. The survey design will help to clarify concepts, establish priorities for future research, identify new research problems, and collect information for practical application. An example of the survey is in appendix 1.

Limitations in this research include the ability to effectively and efficiently identify all researchers who have used LGBTQI2A+ Symbology and navigate the dynamic nature of language in the LGBTQI2A+ community. Another variable to consider is the researcher's biases toward the LGBTQI2A+ community and the threats to internal validity because of bias from differentially selected participants. Furthermore, this research encompasses Queer Theory as it explores the social construction and privileging of sexual identities and is not confined to simplistic categorizations of individuals.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

For a compelling dataset to be created, this research would require 500 samples; a sample being an instance of archival material with LGBTQI2A+ symbolism was used. Purposive sampling from a field of LGBTQI2A+ researchers will allow me to select a sample based on the purpose of the study. The criteria for inclusion in this research project is published research using LGBTQI2A+ archival material.

Participants will be reached via email and asked to complete an online survey, Researchers identified as the targeted population to receive the survey will be asked to fill out an informed consent form and be asked to participate by completing a simple online survey. The survey allows self-reported data collection instruments completed by participants. The survey results will assist in creating datasets integral to further research on improving access to crucial items in LGBTQI2A+ studies.

Surveys do have several potential weaknesses. The response rate may be low for an email-based survey. There is also potential for implicit bias, reactive effects, and too much reliance on memory. The most time-consuming aspect of exploratory survey research is the analysis of the sampled participant responses.

Data analysis of the returned samples will be analyzed using parametric statistics. Intending to collect 500 sample cases, parametric statistics for data analysis is well-suited as it relaxes the normality assumption due to the central limit theorem. Using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient, I can measure the degree of linear association between two variables. The data will be analyzed further in four steps. The first step will establish categories for the data. The categories selected for each variable should be based on sound knowledge of the subject and possible responses. The next step is to code the data by converting the data into numerical codes. The third step is to analyze the descriptive data by considering frequency distributions, pictorial representations, central tendency, and relationships and comparing basic information about samples. The final step is to use inferential statistics to analyze the data. This final step will predict population *parameters* based on random sample *statistics and* assess the validity of this proposal's hypotheses.

Ethics Statement

This research will adhere to ethics that prevent potential abuse of participants and protects me as a researcher. This research respects the research process. Historically the LGBTQ2AI+ community has lived in fear of being outed because of malevolent people wielding hateful rhetoric; thus, through the virtue ethics view, this researcher will take precautions to protect privacy, objectivity, integrity, and independence.

Informed consent protects the right to freedom and self-determination and allows participants to weigh risks and benefits before deciding to participate or not. Before participating in the survey, participants will be informed of the purpose, content, procedures, reporting, and dissemination of research and the risks and benefits of participating. The research will takes steps to ensure nonmaleficence not only of immediate harm but also in any lingering after-effects of this study. Participants will be ensured confidentiality and anonymity. Every participant will have the opportunity to ask questions. Because this is an online survey accessed through email, extra protections will be ensured against identity theft. Participants' signatures are required from every participant.

This research will require self-awareness and reflexivity to assuage potential bias in data analysis. Ensuring ethical data analysis is crucial to establishing the validity of the data set produced by this research. It is the responsibility of the researchers to report results fairly, credibly, and accurately.

Conclusion

The LGBTQ2IA+ community has developed a complex coded language and system of symbology to identify allies. Archival items that contain instances of this coded language and symbology of the LGBTQ2IA+ community are integral to the storytelling process of the LGBTQ2IA+ community. This research looks to identify archival content with LGBTQ2IA+ symbology and how it has been discovered for use in research. Furthermore, this research will assess the potential LGBTQ2IA+ symbology in discoverable metadata.

The primary aim is to assess how researchers discover archival materials containing LGBTQ2I+ symbolism quantitatively. A secondary aim is to qualify the potential inclusion of LGBTQ2I+ symbolism in the archival content description, which will benefit future research into improving access to archival material associated with minority communities worldwide.

Appendix 1

Exploratory survey on the use of LGBTQ2IA+ symbolism in research

How often have you used archival material containing LGBTQ2AI+ symbolism in your research?

1	2	3	4	5
None at all	once or twice	three or four time	five times	six or more

Have you ever explicitly searched for an LGBTQ2AI+ symbol in your research?

YES or NO

If so, what symbol:

Please rate on a scale of 1-5 how the inclusion of LGBTQ2AI+ symbolism in discoverable metadata would improve LGBTQ2AI+ research.

1	2	3	4	5
None at all	Very Little	Moderately	improve a lot	extremely beneficial

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