

Serving LGBTIQ Library and Archive Users: Essays on Outreach, Service, Collections and Access, edited by Ellen Greenblatt.
(McFarland 2011)

reviewed by Jennifer Crow

In 1996 I gave a presentation to my paraprofessional library tech classmates about the inclusion of gay and lesbian communities in addressing multicultural groups in library settings. I spoke about the then newly opened James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center collection in the San Francisco Public Library and the need for all people to see themselves reflected in our diverse culture. At the end of my presentation, I was met with blank stares and silence followed by perfunctory clapping. Coming from a town that has an agriculturally-based economy and is fairly conservative in its political leanings, I didn't think my speech was an act of bravery or even particularly controversial, simply a necessary assertion for those who might not have even considered the gay community as belonging in the context of multiculturalism. I have since acquired a BA and MLIS and while the LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning) community has made sizeable strides towards acceptance, our culture and our library profession have much further to go to realize full embracement. *Serving LGBTIQ Library and Archive Users: Essays on Outreach, Service, Collections and Access*, edited by Ellen Greenblatt, points to both of these opposing facts. It reports that LGBTIQ related collections and archives are rapidly increasing and yet in a 2008 survey of school librarians, 47% admit they may abstain from purchasing a book because it has a homosexual theme. (p. 249) While a number of states have passed non-discrimination workplace laws which include sexual minorities, many "public, school, and academic libraries may or may not provide domestic partner benefits" (p. 290) as is unquestionably afforded to heterosexual spouses.

Serving LGBTIQ Library and Archive Users updates a 1990 publication co-edited by Cal Gough and Ellen Greenblatt entitled *Gay and Lesbian Library Service*. Greenblatt, the associate director for Scholarly Communication and Digital Initiatives at Auraria Library at the University of Denver, explains that reflecting the period in which it was produced, the earlier book concentrated solely on library service for the gay and lesbian communities. *Serving LGBTIQ Library and Archive Users* encompasses a wider-reaching community. The book begins with a glossary of LGBTIQ related terms. While the fluidity of language and recognition of varying use (and users) are noted, these terms allow readers a basis for understanding some common vocabulary. Pertinent concepts such as gender, gender expression, and gender identity are explained.

The amount of material and the range of vision concerning libraries and LGBTIQ issues are impressive. From the more technical aspects of classification systems to poignant personal accounts, the references for each

essay attests to the diligent research performed by the authors. Greenblatt has adeptly arranged the assortment of essays into seven appropriately grouped sections. “Collection Development”, “Bibliographic Access” and “Professional Concerns” are some the sections. Categorizing the wide scope of library related essays allows the reader to easily choose sections of highest interest. While there was understandably some overlap in subject matter and suggested resources, most were fresh. Those that were mentioned more than once only served to intensify their importance.

The first section “New Communities and Connections” informs readers about additional groups added under the umbrella term of LGBTIQ. Bisexual, transgender, and intersex communities are all addressed with specific chapters on each. We are reminded that while these newly associated communities share certain commonalities with the lesbian and gay communities, each group has its own unique preferences and needs. Collaboration between libraries and local organizations can help address each community’s specific needs in such areas as collection development, programming, and suggested resources. New, also, since the 1990 title, is the ubiquity of the Internet and its significant effect on the LGBTIQ community. Through computer usage, sexual minority and gender variant people have gained access to much needed information. Through shared experiences, the isolation often felt by those in earlier years has diminished. This connectivity also permits anonymity. Access to online materials may remain private. Subsequently, there are darker aspects to internet usage; listed in particular are the cruelty of cyberbullying and the short-sightedness of draconian Internet filtering.

Access to information is vital in any library venue and LGBTIQ interests in public, academic, and special libraries are well covered. Noted issues run the gamut of library fundamentals. Collection development, staff training, collection integration, displays and programming are all examined from an LGBTIQ-sensitive perspective. The school environment can present a harrowing experience for sexual minority and gender variant students. In her essay, “School Libraries Make a Difference,” Arla Jones provides a large number of practical ways for librarians to increase support and reduce feelings of isolation for LGBTIQ students. Her suggestions range from simply placing a rainbow sticker on the library door to welcome students to a safe place, to making a commitment to order LGBTIQ themed books, to starting a Gay-Straight Alliance. Jones includes selection tools such as the Rainbow List published yearly by the Rainbow Project, a joint committee supported by the GLBTRT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transsexual Round Table) and SRRT (Social Responsibility Round Table) and the YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association) Printz award list to help make inclusive choices.

In speaking about homophobia and school bullying, Jones astutely points to a GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network) publication which states that students of color experience even higher levels of harassment than their white peers. While she does not elaborate further,

hers is one of the small numbers of essays to bring up LGBTIQ people of color. While LGBTIQ people of color may be included as authors and discussed in some sections, such as specific archives, workplace concerns, and Native peoples' terminology, a more lengthy discussion of their needs and how to facilitate them would be highly valuable. Knowledge of issues pertinent to and available resources for those experiencing a double blow of marginalization would provide librarians with a better understanding of how best to serve their needs. As with the larger LGBTIQ community, it is noted that each specific group differs in its background and culture and we must be careful to recognize those separate needs.

Needs of marginalized groups can also be expressed in terms of controlled vocabularies and bibliographic access as witnessed in Greenblatt's essay, "The Treatment of LGBTIQ Concepts in the Library of Congress Subject Headings." She discusses the concepts of universalization and minoritization explaining their opposing positions and their connection in regards to creating controlled vocabulary. The idea of a universal language necessarily supports the majority or dominant culture whereas a minoritizing language plays up variance and diversity. In an effort to be seen, or in this case retrieved by catalog subject searching, marginalized cultures such as the LGBTIQ community need controlled language that will aggregate and support such search results. After providing an etymology and historical look at terms often used in connection with LGBTIQ subjects, Greenblatt explores the problems inherent for LGBTIQ users in the Library of Congress Subject Headings. She notes the difficulty in making changes to an established universal language, where terms such as sex and gender remain undifferentiated, and the Library of Congress' reluctance to make changes in a timely manner. Greenblatt concludes the essay on a positive note, suggesting ways to remedy outdated and misunderstood language. Also explored in the book are both community-based and mainstream archives. Aimee Brown's fascinating history of LGBTIQ archives explains the shocking lack of archival materials preserved before the Stonewall riots and the gay and feminist liberation movements in the late sixties. Countless items were destroyed by family members and others in misguided efforts to protect their names or the names of the deceased. Unfortunately, the tragedy of the AIDS/HIV epidemic served as the impetus for many people to begin collecting and preserving historical materials. While mainstream archives now find LGBTIQ collections desirable, it was the work of individual visionary collectors fighting to safeguard an all but obliterated history who have enabled us to see into the past.

Despite the fact that LGBTIQ archives may be receiving more exposure, censorship remains a concern, particularly for school and public libraries. Anyone who has read the "Top Ten Challenged Books" on ALA's Banned Book site knows, *And Tango Makes Three* has landed on the list every year since 2006. Based on a true account, this seemingly innocuous picture book tells the story of two male penguins in the New York City Central Park Zoo who, enamored with each other, become a couple. With the help of a sympathetic zookeeper they eventually hatch an egg and become parents

to a baby penguin named Tango. Reasons for the challenges include, anti-family, homosexuality, and unsuited to age group. In a similar challenge, James LaRue, Director of the Douglas County Libraries in Colorado, shares a memorable letter he wrote to a patron who objected to another picture book entitled, *Uncle Bobbie's Wedding*. Using the patron's own words, LaRue deftly responds the patron's concerns. He employs sound logic in a non-confrontational and even caring tone, explaining why this book is a necessary inclusion in the library's collection. Although, one will never know if the patron was swayed from his or her original viewpoint, LaRue should be applauded for his rational and measured response demonstrating the amount of consideration that was taken in reviewing the patron's complaint.

One of the most gratifying aspects of *Serving LGBTIQ Library and Archive Users* is the way Greenblatt ties the highly informative essays with engaging personal narratives from librarians and archivists. The stories of individual striving exemplify the prescriptive put into practice. Stories of perseverance, strength, and accomplishment are many and include Tami Albin's creation of an LGBTIQ oral history archive, James Carmichael's enchanting musings through time and literature, and Bleue Benton and Sharon Grimm's establishment of a transgender resource collection. Perhaps the most powerful of these stories is tatiana de la tierra's passionate account of her life as contained within her archival files. The files hold the archives of her two published magazines for Latina lesbians along with palpable memories of her love affair with magazine cofounder Margarita Castilla. de la tierra takes us back through time to the creation of the first publication, *esto no tiene nombre* (this has no name) to its subsequent death and the beginning of the second magazine, *comotión* (commotion and "with motion"). We come to know and understand something about Margarita in a few short paragraphs and to mourn her death from colon cancer in the next few sentences. It was shocking to learn that her life history, saved in memorabilia, photographs, and love letters, was chucked in the garbage by her uncaring brother. de la tierra, however, ultimately shows us why *Serving LGBTIQ Library and Archive Users* was written. This is why we must follow its examples. To serve the LGBTIQ community is to serve ourselves. Diversity enriches our lives and empowers our humanity. Lest there be any doubt, *Serving LGBTIQ Library and Archive Users* makes it clear, the question is not whether we are serving the LGBTIQ community but how well we are doing it.