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Polish librarians towards meeting the information needs of the LGBTQ+ community

Introduction

Along with the development of new information and communication technologies, there has been a change in how users' information needs are met. The libraries stopped to only serve as institutions focused on searching, developing and sharing information. Facing the dropping number of readers¹ and the dynamic advancement of internet tools that help with education, the real problem became how to effectively encourage readers to visit libraries more often. Some focus on expanding their collections, whilst others attract users by offering diverse meetings, training, and workshops. This way, the purpose of libraries changes and adjusts to the current times, where the key function is not only to deliver knowledge but also to take care of well-being, develop new skills, and promote suitable attitudes amongst consumers². In the face of many changes, such institutions are increasingly becoming centres that offer support to those who suffer from discrimination. An example of such a group of consumers are people from the LGBTQ+ community.

For many years now, sexual orientation has been a very emotional subject in Poland amongst people in power as well as ordinary citizens. In a country where many people declare themselves as part of the catholic church, the way non-heteronormative people are perceived has changed in recent years. According to the latest report published by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS), the percentage of people who declare they know someone who is not straight keeps going up, and in 2021, it reached a record high of 41%. It would not be unusual if it was not for the fact that just thirteen years ago, knowing someone who is of homosexual orientation was only declared by 15% of respondents. Knowing someone who is gay

1 R.S. Connell, L.C. Wallis, D. Comeaux, *The impact of COVID-19 on the use of academic library resources*, "Information Technology and Libraries" 2021, vol. 40, no. 2, <https://doi.org/10.6017/ital.v40i2.12629>.

2 A. Cox, *Library support for student mental health and well-being in the UK: before and during the COVID-19 pandemic*, "Journal of Academic Librarianship" 2020, vol. 46, no. 6, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jacalib.2020.102256>.

or lesbian has an impact on how sexual minorities are perceived³. Same-gender relationships are more commonly accepted and treated the same way as other sexual orientations. It is mainly due to Generation Z, which does not see anything controversial about this (40% of respondents who have positive attitudes towards sexual minorities are people aged 18–24)⁴.

Libraries increasingly often further themselves to the needs of people from the LGBTQ+ community. Although this has become ever more popular, it is still not as widely spread as in other parts of Europe or The United States. In countries where citizens are more tolerant, there are large LGBTQ+-focused collections available as separate resources or as part of bigger collections. Initiatives embarked in the United States deserve particular attention, where fights for the liberation of sexual minorities have been continuing for decades. These initiatives form many different ways of supporting non-heteronormative people. For a long time now, the LGBTQ+ community could also count on the support from the American Library Association (ALA), which in recent years made changes to its Library Bill of Rights⁵, the text of which has been expanded to include a point regarding freedom to use library collections, while respecting readers' privacy⁶. It was a particularly major step towards treating non-heteronormative people in a normal, devoid of prejudice and reluctance way. The recommendations from the largest library association in the world are like a compass for librarians from many countries, showing the appropriate direction of changes. It specifically applies to countries like Poland, where only a few years ago, the non-heteronormative people were met with signs of aggression⁷ and lack of support not only from the public but also from institutions and, more importantly, from the people in power.

The article's author refers to the work of John Siegel, Martin Morris and Gregg A. Stevens that pertain to perceptions of academic librarians toward LGBTQ+ information needs⁸. Using the survey questionnaire developed by the American researchers, it has been decided to study Polish librarians' openness to users from the LGBTQ+ community. It included people working for public, academic, school and pedagogical libraries. The content of the questions was adjusted to better match Polish reality. The matter that could stir unnecessary controversies or contribute to the distortion of research results was omitted.

3 *Stosunek do osób o orientacji homoseksualnej i związków partnerskich*, "Komunikat z Badań CBOS" 2017, no. 174, [on-line:] https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2017/K_174_17.PDF – 20.06.2024.

4 *Stosunek Polaków do osób homoseksualnych*, "Komunikat z Badań CBOS" 2021, no. 121, [on-line:] https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2021/K_121_21.PDF – 20.06.2024.

5 M. Cornog, *Erotophobia, homophobia and censorship in U.S. libraries: An historical overview*, "Journal of Information Ethics" 2016, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 42–58.

6 *Library Bill of Rights*, American Library Association, www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill – 20.06.2024.

7 *ALA Condemns Threats of Violence in Libraries*, American Library Association, [on-line:] <https://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2022/06/ala-condemns-threats-violence-libraries> – 10.06.2024.

8 J. Siegel, M. Morris, G.A. Stevens, *Perceptions of academic librarians toward LGBTQ information needs: An exploratory study*, "College & Research Libraries" 2020, vol. 81, iss. 1, pp. 122–148.

Literature Review

Around the world, more and more countries are abandoning discriminatory laws and practices regarding the LGBTQ+ community. A leading role in this respect is played by the United States and Australia, where the first attempts in this regard were made in the 1970s⁹. At that time, the real challenge was censoring LGBTQ+ materials and controlling publications that appeared in bookstores. Both the United States and Canadian governments aimed to eliminate “obscene” content from public spaces. These activities intensified in the late 1970s (Stonewall Uprising) and the 1980s (HIV/AIDS epidemic). Stigmatisation and discrimination of non-heteronormative people often became a tool in the fight for power or political influence, especially in the case of conservative parties. In some countries (including Poland) we are still dealing with this phenomenon today.

The end of the last century and the beginning of this century brought many changes in promoting diversity and supporting minorities. It is noticeable in many areas, and above all in the culture and science sector, where the percentage of non-heteronormative people is higher¹⁰. Equal and direct access to information is crucial, especially now – in the face of disinformation threats. In many countries, librarians are active in this area, gaining support from the world of science, which increasingly addresses issues related to meeting the information needs of people at risk of exclusion and discrimination.

The first works in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS), dedicated to people from the LGBTQ+ community, cover issues regarding the provision of library services and, above all, what needs to be done to encourage various types of users to use LGBTQ+ collections. Modern researchers agree that libraries should play an important role in meeting the information needs of non-heteronormative people. In 1984, Sasha Alyson argued that LGBTQ+ literature should be treated like books from other categories, and every library should have such items in its collections¹¹. A few years later, Richard Ashby, in an article entitled “Library Services to Lesbian and Gay People”, argued that a commitment to neutrality should be the basis of library services for all people, regardless of their sexual orientation. The researcher argued that libraries have a chance to support people from the LGBTQ+ community in gaining knowledge and overcoming feelings of isolation. Developing appropriate standards and involving specialised personnel in these activities is necessary to achieve this¹².

9 M. Matheson, E. Tait, S. Reynolds, *Checking the pulse of LGBTIQ+ inclusion and representation in the academic library: A literature review*, “Journal of the Australian” 2020, vol. 69, iss. 1, pp. 31–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24750158.2019.1686571>.

10 T. Senzee, *20 LGBTQ People Who Changed the World*, Advocate, 7.08.2016, [on-line:] <https://www.advocate.com/world/2016/7/08/20-lgbt-people-who-changed-world#rebell-titem1> – 12.06.2024.

11 S. Alyson, *What librarians should know about gay and lesbian publishing*, “Collection Building” 1984, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 22–23, <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb023138>.

12 R. Ashby, *Library services to gay and lesbian people*, “Assistant Librarian” 1987, vol. 80, no. 10, pp. 153–155.

In the 1990s, authors of subsequent studies approached the issue of serving readers from the LGBTQ+ community more holistically than their predecessors. While the new role of libraries was defined quite generally, there was a need to examine the needs of non-heteronormative people more thoroughly. In 1990, American librarians Cal Gough and Ellen Greenblatt were among the first to raise the issue of library services addressed to people from the LGBTQ+ community in the book entitled "Gay and Lesbian Library Service". The authors then turned their attention to collections made available by school, academic and public libraries and archives. An important issue raised in this study were censorship efforts aimed at eliminating LGBTQ+ items from library catalogues. Gough and Greenblatt, for the needs of librarians involved in spreading good role models and promoting diversity, decided to create a list of literature on LGBTQ+ topics. In addition to recommended books, the list included films, music recordings, art catalogues, biographies of famous gays and lesbians and documents regarding ALA policy to support non-heteronormative people¹³. In 1993 the results of research by Alisa Whitt, who surveyed 141 lesbians from North Carolina, were published. It turned out that in the absence of professional literature on topics related to gender identity and dealing with the feeling of alienation, libraries can, to a large extent, be used as a source of valuable information¹⁴. Similar attempts to examine information needs were made in the late 1990s by other American researchers – Tanis L. Stenback and Alvin Schrader. Based on interviews with randomly selected lesbians, they concluded that the most frequently reported demands among non-heteronormative library users is the lack of an appropriate approach on the part of librarians to people looking for LGBTQ+ literature¹⁵.

An interesting relationship was noted by Beth Brendler, who, together with other scientists from the University of Missouri, examined twenty-four American public libraries in terms of their collections intended for non-heteronormative people. It turned out that most of this type of publications are located in institutions operating in the north of the country, while in the southern states, considered more conservative, there are much fewer. In the mentioned study, library catalogues were searched using a checklist with 24 different terms, the set of which was developed together with experts from ALA (the American Library Association's Stonewall Awards list and Rainbow lists were used). Ultimately, a list of eighty most frequently appearing titles was created, including: fiction, graphic and non-fiction novels. Most of them concerned gays, lesbians and transgender people. A much smaller collection consisted of publications about bisexual and intersexual people and queer culture. The research proved the existence of a small representation of LGBTQ+ literature in the observed libraries. There was a shortage of not only traditional books, but also other formats (e.g., e-books, audiobooks),

13 C. Gough, E. Greenblatt, *Gay and Lesbian Library Service*, McFarland, New York 1990.

14 A. Whitt, *The information needs of lesbian and bisexual women*, "Library and Information Science Research" 1993, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 275–288.

15 T.L. Stenback, A. Schrader, *Venturing from the closet: A qualitative study of the information needs of lesbians*, "Public Library Quarterly" 1999, vol. 17, iss. 3, pp. 37–50, https://doi.org/10.1300/J118v17n03_04.

the rental of which is more comfortable for non-heteronormative people who have problems with revealing their sexual orientation¹⁶.

The issue of access to LGBTQ+ collections was also studied by Michele A. L. Villagran and Darra Hofman from San José State University in California. The researchers pointed out that librarians increasingly play the role of social workers, educators, and people who meet basic needs, often without financial support. Working with LGBTQ+ people is crucial to ensuring equal access to information. It is worth mentioning here the recommendations of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), which state that libraries should actively promote social inclusion and eliminate discrimination. All available services should be provided to everyone, regardless of age, citizenship, political beliefs, physical or mental abilities, gender identity, heritage, education, income, or social status¹⁷. In turn, other American researchers – Bharat Mehra and Donna Braquet – drew attention to the difficulties associated with using library services by people from the LGBTQ+ community. These include social isolation, negative reactions from other people, lack of political representation, and formalised information support systems, i.e., access to high-quality information¹⁸. John Pruitt also mentioned the strong sense of fear that accompanies people at risk of social exclusion on a daily basis. He drew attention to the problems faced by gay discussion book clubs, whose members prefer to gather in private apartments rather than in libraries, which is caused by the lack of acceptance from the local community and resistance from people managing GLAM institutions. Financial issues are also important – the frequent lack of money in the city budget determines the launch or limitation of certain services for inhabitants. Following the conclusions formulated by Pruitt, it is also worth remembering the positive effects of promoting inclusiveness and supporting diversity in libraries. People at risk of social exclusion gain an institution where they can feel at ease, while libraries become supporting institutions, expanding their offer with collections addressed to the LGBTQ+ community¹⁹. It is impossible not to mention the research conducted by John Siegel, Martin Morris and Gregg A. Stevens, the results of which inspired the author of this article to conduct similar observations among Polish librarians. These American researchers drew attention to issues related to the knowledge of terms

16 B. Brendler, L. Beckman, D. Adkins, H. Moulaison Sandy, N. Wiggins-Prelas, V. Adams, *Provide the highest level of service: Public library collections of LGBTQ* materials for adolescents in the United States*, "The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults" 2017, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 1–32.

17 M.A.L. Villagran, D. Hofman, *The Intersection: Intellectual Privacy and Equity for Queer Library Users '88th IFLA World Library and Information Congress (WLIC); Rotterdam; Satellite Meeting: 'The Library is open': creating safe working environments for LGBTQ+ library employees and marketing supportive LGBTQ+ services', 7-Sep-2023*, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

18 B. Mehra, D. Braquet, *Library and information science professionals as community action researchers in an academic setting: Top ten directions to further institutional change for people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities*, "Library Trends" 2007, vol. 56, no. 2, pp. 542–565.

19 J. Pruitt, *Gay men's book clubs versus Wisconsin's public libraries: Political perceptions in the absence of dialogue*, "The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy" 2010, vol. 80, no. 2, pp. 121–141.

related to the LGBTQ+ community and library services. They also indicated in which parts of the country the degree of discrimination against non-heteronormative people is greater and identified indicators that may make it difficult to meet the information needs of discriminated people²⁰.

Libraries are increasingly perceived as supporting institutions²¹. For example, British libraries have transformed from traditional book-lending institutions into dynamic media centres, promoting the local community's mental and physical health and well-being²². In this context, a key issue is the development of guidelines for the proper service of non-heteronormative people and developing appropriate practices in this area²³. It is also important to define problems in access to information for LGBTQ+ users and other users of public, academic and school libraries²⁴. For this purpose, more and more guides and textbooks are being created, which serve as a signpost, especially for librarians who started working several decades ago²⁵. Summaries, bibliographic lists, and recommendations from industry organisations and associations are also helpful²⁶.

Polish LIS representatives dealing with the issue of providing library services to people from the LGBTQ+ community include Michał Zając, the author of the only publication on the activities of the library community for people from the LGBTQ+ community. The scientist presented the most important achievements of the Rainbow Round Table task force established within the ALA structures and presented the most important activities of this organisation in the field of promoting diversity – organising bibliographic lists, publishing lists of books on LGBTQ+ topics and establishing the Stonewall Book Award commemorating the riots of 1969²⁷. Due to the above, there was a strong need to conduct a broader examination of the Polish

20 J. Siegel, M. Morris, G.A. Stevens, *op. cit.*

21 M.M. Philbin, C.M. Parker, M.G. Flaherty, J.S. Hirsch, *Public libraries: A community-level resource to advance population health*, "Journal Community Health" 2019, vol. 44, no. 1, pp. 192–199, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-018-0547-4>.

22 M. Karki, M.L. El Asmar, ER. Sasco, A. El-Osta, *Public libraries to promote public health and wellbeing: a cross-sectional study of community-dwelling adults*, "BMC Public Health" 2024, vol. 24, article 1226, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-18535-5>.

23 T. Robinson, *Overcoming social exclusion in public library services to LGBTQ and gender variant youth*, "Public Library Quarterly" 2016, vol. 35, iss. 3, pp. 161–174, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2016.1210439>.

24 C.M. Pierson, *Barriers to access and information for the LGBTQ community / Obstacles à l'accès et à l'information pour la communauté LGBTQ*, "Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science" 2017, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 245–262, muse.jhu.edu/article/699702.

25 H. Olsson, E. Pavlov, *A Guide for Working with LGBTQ+ Issues in the Library*, [on-line:] <https://www.biblioteksfor.cdn.triggerfish.cloud/uploads/2021/08/hbtqi-16-08.pdf> – 20.06.2024.

26 *ALA Announces Steps to Support LGBTQIA+ Library Workers*, American Libraries Magazine, 9.08.2023, [on-line:] <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/ala-announces-steps-to-support-lgbtqia-library-workers> – 21.06.2024.

27 M. Zając, *'Rainbow Round Table' i jego działalność na rzecz społeczności LGBT+ w USA: bibliotekarzy i użytkowników bibliotek*, [in:] *Wokół bibliotek i dziedzictwa kultury. Księga jubileuszowa dedykowana prof. dr hab. Elżbiecie Barbarze Zybort z okazji 45-lecia pracy naukowej*, ed. R. Kotowski, SBP, Warszawa 2022.

library community in terms of meeting the information needs of people from the LGBTQ+ community and to identify the most important problems related to it.

Methods

For the study, a survey questionnaire consisting of fifteen questions was developed. The main goal was to determine how Polish librarians approach meeting the information needs of people from the LGBTQ+ community. A tool prepared by John Siegel, Martin Morris and Gregg A. Stevens was used. The research was conducted from February 1 to June 30, 2024. Google tools were used to develop the questionnaire.

Poland has 7570 public libraries, employing 22 thousand librarians (15,2 thousand in librarian positions). Nearly half of them (48.5%) have tertiary qualifications²⁸. It was impossible to reach everyone, so the author distributed the survey in several ways. To reach librarians from public libraries, questionnaires were sent by e-mail. In this case, the addresses of the institutions were found on the websites of voivodeship public libraries. The second method was to post the questionnaire on social media – through groups of librarians on Facebook. The next step was to find the Internet addresses of academic and pedagogical libraries. In this case, tabs containing a list of contact details of employees of individual departments were used. As a result, responses were obtained from 716 respondents. Quantitative data (using the Likert scale) and qualitative data (using specific scenarios) were collected. The primary goal was to ensure the anonymity of the respondents. Therefore, the author decided not to collect information that could facilitate their identification.

In the first part of the study, respondents were asked to provide demographic data and to declare whether they belong to the LGBTQ+ community. The second part concerned primarily knowledge of the ten most important terms related to LGBTQ+ issues. For this purpose, a Likert scale from 'never heard' to 'very familiar' was used.

Librarians were also asked to assess their level of comfort in meeting the information needs of LGBTQ+ people. For this purpose, thirteen different situations were used, to which respondents were asked to respond using a Likert scale – from 'very uncomfortable' to 'very comfortable'. The Siegel, Morris and Stevens scenarios were used in the prepared cases. However, they were adapted to Polish realities. It is worth emphasising that the issue of minority rights still raises a lot of controversy in Poland, which is why the author decided to limit himself to asking librarians more general questions while not giving up on issues such as rainbow parenting or gender reassignment.

In the end, the author decided to ask about the need to use additional forms of education in meeting the information needs of people from the LGBTQ+ community and an opportunity was given to answer an open question regarding reflections on serving non-heteronormative users and people interested in LGBTQ+ issues.

28 *Raport GUS – Biblioteki publiczne w 2023 r.*, Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 19.06.2024, [on-line:] <https://nprcz.pl/news/raport-gus-biblioteki-publiczne-w-2023-r> – 15.06.2024.

Data Analysis

Data was summarised using the LookerStudio tool from Google and the Ms Excel application. The analyses were performed using Python (3.11.8) with the following libraries: pandas (2.2.1), factor_analyzer (0.5.1). In order to check how closely the questions used in the survey questionnaire are interrelated, Cronbach's Alpha consistency analysis was performed. It is a method often used when conducting questionnaire research. The value of this indicator can range from 0 to 1. It is assumed that the higher it is, the greater the test's internal consistency, i.e., the more reliable the test is²⁹. The second method used was exploratory factor analysis (EFA), describing the tool's structure by separating subscales. In this analysis, EFA with 'varimax' rotation was used. The number of dimensions was determined by the number of eigenvalues greater than 1³⁰. For the use of EFA to be justified, the p-value of the Bartlett test should be less than 0.05 and the KMO value close to 1 (cut-off points are usually 0.5 or 0.6)³¹. The above methods were applied to questions in which respondents were asked to determine their knowledge of all concepts related to the LGBTQ+ community and their level of comfort in thirteen proposed situations (questions: 10, 11, 12).

Since the questions regarding determining the level of comfort were characterised by high internal consistency, in order to facilitate the analysis, a new artificial variable was created, which is the aggregate of all questions regarding comfort. This variable was calculated as the arithmetic mean of all answers, for each person separately (e.g., for each person, the value of this variable was calculated as the arithmetic mean of all answers given by this person). In order to check whether there is a relationship between the respondents' level of comfort and gender, a Student's t-test with Welch's correction was performed. In turn, an ANOVA test was performed to check whether there is a relationship between the level of comfort of the respondents and their place of residence.

Findings and Discussion

A total of 716 responses were received from librarians working in various types of libraries in Poland: public (560; 78.2%), academic (52; 7.2%), pedagogical (18; 2.5%) and school (59; 8.3%). Twenty-seven (3.8%) respondents refused to answer the question about their place of work. Among the people participating in the study, 631 (88.1%) were women, 65 (9.1%) were men and 7 (1%) were non-binary. Thirteen people refused to answer this question (1.8%).

The largest group were people aged 40–49 (232; 32.4%) and 50–59 (208; 29.1%). Third place was taken by librarians aged 31–39 (164; 22.9%), fourth by

29 T. Rak, S. Wrześniowski, *Alfa Cronbacha – co daje dobre wyniki? Kilka uwag dotyczących budowania kwestionariuszy psychologicznych*, "Przegląd Psychologiczny" 2023, vol. 66, no. 4, pp. 67–84, <https://doi.org/10.31648/przeglpsychologiczny.10084>.

30 H. Arsham, M. Lovric, *Bartlett's test*, [in:] *International Encyclopedia of Statistical Science*, ed. M. Lovric, Springer, Berlin–Heidelberg 2011, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-04898-2_132.

31 J. Górniak, *Analiza czynnikowa i analiza głównych składowych*, "Ask: Research and Methods" 1998, no. 7, pp. 83–102.

those aged 26–30 (50; 7%) and fifth by those aged 60–69 (46; 6.4%). The smallest group were people aged 18–25 (15; 2.1%) and 70–79 (1; 0.1%).

Additionally, the respondents were asked about belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. Six hundred and one (84%) respondents answered negatively, while sixty-six (9.2%) answered affirmatively. Forty-nine (6.8%) people refused to answer this question. The highest rate of refusal was observed in the case of people living in villages and smaller towns (33; 8.9%). The smallest number of respondents admitted belonging to the LGBTQ+ community (18; 4.8%). The largest number of non-heteronormative respondents (23; 14.6%) were observed in cities with over 500 000 inhabitants.

The respondents were also asked how long they had been working at their current job. Two hundred and twenty-nine (32%) declared having work experience of over 20 years. Slightly fewer (199; 27.8%) stated that they had performed their duties for less than 5 years. One hundred and thirty-five people (18.9%) indicated their work experience over 5 years, 84 (11.7%) – over 15 years, and 69 (9.6%) – over 10 years.

In the next stage of the study, librarians were asked about their readiness to meet the information needs of people from the LGBTQ+ community. Most of all age groups agreed (457; 63.8%) or were neutral (191; 26.7%). The highest number of refusals was observed in the age groups 40–49 and 50–59 (43 in total; 9.8%). It can be assumed that this could be because the librarians asked do not have non-heteronormative people in their immediate environment or simply do not pay attention to it (a total of 236 such people were recorded; 33%). Most respondents (480; 67%) declared they knew people from the LGBTQ+ community. It is also worth noting that both non-heteronormative and heteronormative librarians had a high level of support for meeting the information needs of LGBTQ+ people (Table 1).

Table 1. Answers to question: 'I am confident in serving LGBTQ+ information needs'

	LGBTQ+ librarians	Non-LGBTQ+ librarians	Others (I don't want to answer)	All librarians
Strongly agree	28	62	6	96 (13,4%)
Agree	35	305	21	361 (50,4%)
Neutral	2	174	15	191 (26,7%)
Disagree	1	48	5	54 (7,5%)
Strongly disagree	-	12	2	14 (2%)

Most respondents emphasised that people from the LGBTQ+ community should be treated the same as other users:

One should treat these people like other users, like normal people and not like a separate social group with special needs. A man is a man and people working in the institutions of culture, where it is required to meet certain standards and respect another person, should be tolerant and supportive.

Such people should be treated with due respect and attention similarly to how it takes place when serving other users.

I do not see a difference when serving people from the LGBTQ+ community. These are normal people like everyone else. One should not create a problem because of someone's identity of sexual orientation.

In the next part of the study, librarians were asked about the types of services provided so far to people from the LGBTQ+ community. Sharing books received the most responses (278), but almost the same number of people admitted that they did not have the opportunity to meet the information needs of non-heteronormative people (274). The next positions included: helping in choosing reading material (199), collection development (192), new books (172), providing library instruction (113) and using the collections in the reading room (110). The least frequently mentioned were: information technology (79), marketing/PR (45), participation in a meeting with an expert (33) and other forms of service provision (28).

There were also opinions among librarians pointing out the need to promote good practices and support those who do not have access to professional materials:

It would be valuable if bibliographic lists containing recommended LGBTQ+ focused topics were distributed to libraries.

It would be worth to have activities that include people from LGBTQ+ communities, to promote catalogues of books containing good practices and to cooperate with different groups of people when creating lists of best reads.

The above statements were also reflected in the answer to the question regarding the need to organise courses and training that could support librarians in working with users from the LGBTQ+ community. Most respondents declared their willingness to participate in this type of meetings (Table 2).

Table 2. Answers to question: 'I would benefit from training to help meet LGBTQ+ information needs'

	LGBTQ+ librarians	Non-LGBTQ+ librarians	Others (I don't want to answer)	All librarians
Strongly agree	23	114	11	148 (20,7%)
Agree	34	289	18	341 (47,7%)
Neutral	7	133	16	156 (21,8%)
Disagree	1	49	3	53 (7,5%)
Strongly disagree	1	16	1	18 (1,9%)

The most frequently mentioned forms of education for representatives of all age groups included: virtual training/webinar (125 indications), conference/workshop/seminar (73), meeting with a person from the LGBTQ+ community (62), online courses (60), social media discussion group (47), stationary training (31), talking with other librarians (22), talking with LGBTQ+ people (21). The option 'I am not interested in such training' was selected 154 times, while 121 people suggested other forms of education, such as living library, visiting a gay-friendly library or cooperating with foundations acting against discrimination.

The concerns librarians shared in response to the last open question in the survey questionnaire were also worth noting. It encouraged some to pay attention to important organisational issues in their workplace:

It would be helpful to have a separate fund for purchasing LGBTQ+ literature. Currently, as a small village library we can only afford to purchase one book per month and most often it is a copy from outside the LGBTQ+ focused topics.

It is sometimes not clear how to register a person from the LGBTQ+ community – if there is a discrepancy between personal details written in their ID card and their pronouns, we are not sure how to address them.

Attention was repeatedly drawn to issues related to appropriate communication and the need for greater education in promoting diversity and inclusion among librarians. One of the study's primary goals was to assess the level of knowledge of basic terms related to the LGBTQ+ community. An extensive list of concepts was deliberately omitted and only selected ones were proposed. According to the adopted ALA recommendations, modern librarians should be able to properly catalogue collections (including those on LGBTQ+ topics) and, if possible, create bibliographic lists for various groups of readers. In this context, knowledge of basic LGBTQ+ concepts seems extremely important. The study proposed **10 terms**. For each of them, the respondent had to select one of the five available options, according to the Likert scale: very familiar, familiar, somewhat familiar, heard but not familiar and never heard.

The following terms were the easiest to define (the number of indications is given in brackets): **bisexual** (very familiar: 333; familiar: 328), **asexual** (very familiar: 325; familiar: 302), **gay** (very familiar: 403; familiar: 294), **homosexual** (very familiar: 401; familiar: 290), **lesbian** (very familiar: 399; familiar: 295) and **transgender** (familiar: 362; very familiar: 296). The terms caused more problems: **cis woman** (never heard: 308), **cis man** (never heard: 304), **pansexual** (never heard: 206) and **queer** (familiar: 186; very familiar: 168). The study showed that the older the librarian, the worse their knowledge in this area. In the youngest age groups, all terms were recognised very well.

The factor analysis conducted for all terms (Table 3) confirmed the above findings. As a result, two groups of concepts were distinguished – known and not problematic issues (group 1) and those that librarians have heard about but cannot fully define (group 2).

In-depth research in the form of factor analysis was also conducted in relation to questions in which librarians were to assess their level of comfort when meeting the information needs of people from the LGBTQ+ community (Table 4). Here, it was not possible to distinguish more than one group from the proposed situations.

Since the questions about comfort were characterised by high internal consistency, a new artificial variable was created for additional analysis, which was the aggregate of all questions about comfort. This variable was determined as the arithmetic mean of all answers regarding comfort, for each person separately.

Table 3. Rate of knowledge of the terms related to the LGBTQ+ community – results of exploratory factor analysis (question 10)

		value	95% confidence interval								
Cronbach' alpha		0.880	(0.867 – 0.893)								
		chi ²	p-value								
Bartlett's test		7924.041	<0.001								
		value									
KMO		0.851									
Eigenvalues of Factors (F)											
eigenvalue	F1:	F2:	F3:	F4:	F5:	F6:	F7:	F8:	F9:	F10:	
	5.588	2.088187	0.561688	0.496139	0.42659207	0.348549	0.241809	0.184848	0.051944	0.012245	
Group	Terms related to the LGBTQ+ community						Factor 1		Factor 2		
1	bisexual						0.813664		0.257557		
2	cis man						0.120049		0.960424		
2	cis woman						0.119806		0.950758		
1	transgender						0.739564		0.265046		
1	gay						0.926923		0.125091		
1	lesbian						0.902251		0.131169		
2	queer						0.327933		0.657621		
1	homosexual						0.82562		0.155486		
2	pansexual						0.280706		0.68325		
1	asexual						0.655951		0.291488		

Table 4. Rate the level of comfort during meeting the information needs of people from the LGBTQ+ community – results of exploratory factor analysis (questions 11–12)

		value	95% confidence interval								
Cronbach' alpha		0.970	(0.967 – 0.974)								
		chi ²	p-value								
Bartlett's test		11228.045	<0.001								
		value									
KMO		0.954									
Eigenvalues of Factors (F)											
eigenvalue	F1:	F2:	F3:	F4:	F5:	F6:	F7:	F8:	F9:	F10:	
	9.673373	0.752857	0.667601	0.343409	0.323761	0.224488	0.201664	0.187796	0.165426	0.140095	
Situation											
An answer to a question about the offer of books on LGBTQ+ topics in the library where you work											
Help the user find gender identity related materials											
Response to a request from a 65-year-old member of the LGBTQ+ community for materials on safe sexual practices											
Help in choosing the right LGBTQ+ book to read on vacation											
Helping an adult user choose appropriate reading material about LGBTQ+ sexual practices											
Helping an underage user choose reading material on LGBTQ+ topics											
Helping parents choose the right book that can help them understand their homosexual child											
Providing recommendations for books, websites and other resources to a teacher planning an anti-violence talk at school that includes LGBTQ+ issues											
Giving a recommendation on the choice of reading material to a person planning gender reassignment											

Giving a recommendation on the choice of reading material to a teenager interested in the topic of sexual orientation
Giving a recommendation on the choice of reading material to a teenager who wants to reveal himself as a homosexual person to family and friends
Receiving a request to purchase an LGBTQ+ book that is not available in the library
Request to organise a meeting with the author of a book on LGBTQ+ topics

In order to check whether there is a relationship between the level of comfort and gender, a Student's t-test with Welch's correction was performed (Table 5).

Table 5. Results of t-Student test – examining the relationship between comfort level and gender of respondents

	T	dof	p-val	95% confidence interval	cohen-d
T-test	-1.252015	73.394384	0.215	[-0.4 0.09]	0.189759

The P-value of the Student's t-test gives no reason to believe that comfort depends on gender. In order to check whether there is a relationship between comfort and gender, Welch's ANOVA test was performed (Table 6).

Table 6. Results of ANOVA test – examining the relationship between comfort level and place of residence of respondents

	ddof1	ddof2	F	p-unc	np2
0	4	299.257643	9.572898	<0.001	0.050789

The P-value of the test shows that the level of comfort of librarians depends on their place of residence. In order to determine what dependencies exist between places of residence, multiple comparisons were made using the Student's (Welch) t-test with Holm's correction for multiple comparisons (Table 7).

Table 7. Pairwise comparisons – examining the relationship between comfort level and place of residence of respondents

	A	B	T	degrees of freedom	adjusted p-value	Hedges' g
0	countryside	city up to 50 000 residents	-1.324318	349.386999	0.569921	-0.138734
1	countryside	city from 50 000 to 100 000 residents	-1.474855	141.029298	0.569921	-0.201603
2	countryside	city from 100 000 to 500 000 residents	-5.082602	191.165583	0.000009*	-0.635358
3	countryside	city with over 500 000 residents	-4.658658	295.559855	0.000043*	-0.509987
4	city up to 50 000 residents	city from 50 000 to 100 000 residents	-0.431051	160.957624	1.000000	-0.057635
5	city up to 50 000 residents	city from 100 000 to 500 000 residents	-3.743871	215.575870	0.001860*	-0.463938
6	city up to 50 000 residents	city with over 500 000 residents	-3.258609	313.441915	0.008698*	-0.360441
7	city from 50,000 to 100,000 residents	city from 100 000 to 500 000 residents	-2.731443	175.290245	0.041705*	-0.401170
8	city from 50,000 to 100,000 residents	city with over 500 000 residents	-2.268925	184.207110	0.122163	-0.297028
9	city from 100,000 to 500,000 residents	city with over 500 000 residents	0.604567	236.588819	1.000000	0.0744

* Significance values $p < 0.05$ are marked in colour

Based on the analyses, the following was shown:

- a) significant differences in the level of comfort between inhabitants of rural areas and cities with 100 000 to 500 000 inhabitants; the negative sign of the g-Hedges measure indicates that in villages the level of comfort is lower than in cities with 100 000 to 500 000 inhabitants;
- b) significant differences in the level of comfort between inhabitants of rural areas and cities with over 500 000 inhabitants; the negative sign of the g-Hedges measure indicates that the level of comfort in villages is lower than in cities with over 500 000 inhabitants;
- c) significant differences in the level of comfort between inhabitants of cities with up to 50 000 inhabitants and cities with 100 000 and 500 000 inhabitants; the negative sign of the g-Hedges measure indicates that in cities with up to 5000 inhabitants, the level of comfort is lower than in cities with 100 000 to 500 000 inhabitants;
- d) significant differences in the level of comfort between inhabitants of cities with up to 50 000 inhabitants and cities with more than 500 000 inhabitants; the negative sign of the g-Hedges measure indicates that in cities with up to 50 000 inhabitants, the level of comfort is lower than in cities with more than 500 000 inhabitants;
- e) significant differences in the level of comfort between inhabitants of cities with 50 000 to 100 000 inhabitants and cities with 100 000 to 500 000 inhabitants; the negative sign of the g-Hedges measure indicates that in cities with 50 000 to 100 000 inhabitants, the level of comfort is lower than in cities with 100 000 to 500 000 inhabitants.

Limitations

According to research by the German Dalia Institute, the LGBTQ+ community in Poland consists of nearly 2 million citizens, i.e. 4.9%. Berlin researchers recorded the highest percentage of non-heteronormative people among the so-called millennials and people from Generation Z. The more people know and feel safer, the more open they are about who they are. In 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023, in the annual ILGA-Europe report, Poland was recognised as the country that discriminates against LGBTQ+ people most in the entire European Union. According to a report by organisations defending the rights of sexual minorities in Poland, 70% of LGBTQ+ teenagers in Poland have suicidal thoughts, and 1/3 of them have made suicide attempts. In such a situation, it is necessary to act to promote diversity and counteract discrimination, in which libraries have also been participating for some time³².

The survey was conducted among librarians who, for the first time, had the opportunity to comment on the issue of serving users from the LGBTQ+ community. The tool used in the form of an online questionnaire provided a sense of comfort and guaranteed discretion for people who did not want to reveal

32 M. Matzke, *Najnowsze statystyki nt. społeczności LGBT w Europie*, Deutsche Welle, 5.11.2016, <https://www.dw.com/pl/najnowsze-statystyki-nt-społeczności-lgbt-w-europie-niemcy-na-czele/a-36274673> – 1.07.2024.

their identity. Nevertheless, the author was aware that some people may have had problems completing the questionnaire due to various factors. An example was the question about belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, to which as many as 49 people refused to answer (the vast majority of them were inhabitants of villages and small towns). Another difficulty was the way some questions were formulated. Even though their wording was adapted to Polish realities, some respondents had problems with determining the level of comfort felt when interacting with people from the LGBTQ+ community or answering questions concerning basic terms related to it. Some respondents also pointed out the lack of need to answer questions about how non-heteronormative people are served, suggesting that they are ordinary users who do not require special treatment. However, in an open question, the majority admitted that such questions are necessary, as are regulations and good practices in meeting the information needs of people from the LGBTQ+ community.

It is also impossible not to mention the people who completed the survey but decided to comment on the study obscenely or shamefully in an open question. Fortunately, there were only five such respondents. Below are sample comments:

I am not interested in someone's sexual orientation. If a person came to me and told me that they were Napoleon, I would think they were insane. If a person admits that, for example they are necrophile, then my negative attitude can offend them. This is some kind of paranoia. Perhaps you should create a questionnaire applicable to people with an amputated limb in Poland. I am sure there are plenty of people like that and they do not impose themselves on others.

A separate problem was reaching librarians and encouraging them to complete the questionnaire. Requests to post it on librarian Facebook groups were generally met with goodwill from the recipients. Difficulties arose in the case of closed communities and organisations working for librarians. It would seem that the latter would be especially interested in supporting research but they often used the adopted principles or lack of organisational possibilities as a cover. In general, the appearance of information encouraging people to participate in the study met with a positive response among librarians. Although there were individual opinions containing a homophobic message (most often expressed in the comments section), the comments were mostly favourable. Similar situations occurred in the case of surveys sent by e-mail. Here, with a few exceptions, the author could count on a great response rate from the respondents. In the case of some libraries, e-mail addresses were out of date or belonged to people who were not librarians.

Conclusions

Initially, conducting this study amongst the Polish librarians seemed exceedingly difficult. It is also worth mentioning that a political party governed the country with far-right views for the past eight years. In the peak moment (June 2021), there were over one hundred "anti-LGBT" resolutions under which "LGBT-free zones" were established in several Polish towns. These zones covered over one-third of the Polish territory (equivalent to the size of Hungary). Fortunately, thanks to the

social pressure and the risk of withholding EU funds, most local governments have removed these outrageous declarations³³. Unfortunately, there are still people who misjudge the LGBTQ+ community often referring to their own faith or prejudices. It includes people who are employed in the institutions of cultures. One such person who took part in this research shared her views:

Because of my religious beliefs, I do not manifest my lack of acceptance of LGBT+ people, however I am against propagation of this subject, as the principles of the Bible clearly indicate how God perceives such people. Because I do not consider myself perfect, I want to show my tolerance towards peoples' choices, this includes choices related to their gender or sex life. However, message from the Bible is unequivocal and does not leave room for interpretation or freedom in such matters. I have a friend who is homosexual and I know how difficult it is for LGBT people to cope with their sexuality and the acceptance of otherness, not by other people but by themselves.

It would seem that in a country deeply rooted in its traditions, where for the last decade the society was fed with ideas aimed at discriminating minorities, we can experience reluctance towards people from the LGBTQ+ community, especially among people living in smaller towns. These were the author's initial assumptions. The conducted studies have proven that this is not the case. Much of this is thanks to librarians from villages and smaller towns, who meet their residents' information needs and promote several types of inclusive initiatives. One of the examples could be a project completed with a help of non-governmental organisations aimed at promoting diversity by organising sessions with people from the LGBTQ+ community, promoting LGBTQ+-focused literature or by actively participating in the Pride Month events.

Regarding offers addressed to non-heteronormative people, smaller libraries are not inferior compared to those operating in larger cities, where it is easier to collect funds and persuade people to participate in this type of events. For obvious reasons, institutions with large public relations departments can afford greater momentum by engaging experts from various fields. They also have access to more premises and logistical options. The connecting element for librarians from smaller and larger libraries that was strongly emphasised in this study, was the need to organise trainings, workshops and classes aimed at educating library employees to, among others, being able to appropriately address people from the LGBTQ+ community and advise on the selection of reading materials, especially for the youngest readers. It is not true that such initiatives are not needed, which can be seen in the statements from a person working in a library:

The problem that is seen in many branches is creating separate zones or sections for the LGBTQ+ community. It seems like the librarians mean well but it is very often received as stigmatisation or singling out. I very often draw from young peoples' experience, who look at sexual preferences completely differently, they show solutions that seem to be natural and smart.

33 Y. Kostrzewa, M. Dzierżanowski, G. Miecznikowski, K. Rogaska, *Jak pisać i mówić o osobach LGBTQ+? Poradnik*, <https://jakmowicolgbt.pl/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Jak-mowic-i-pisac-o-osobach-darmowy-poradnik-wyd-3.pdf.pdf> – 1.07.2024.

The example above shows how openness can be misunderstood not because of malice but because of lack of knowledge. Therefore, an appropriate training offer tailored for library staff can improve the services' quality. It may also be influenced by grassroots initiatives of librarians themselves, whose actions may change the way people from the LGBTQ+ community perceive libraries:

A change in the law is needed when it comes to transgender people, who did not complete their legal transitions and who are trying to sing up for a library, who identify themselves differently than it is written on their ID card. A more friendly for them process and preferred name and pronouns.

Our library was awarded "a senior-friendly place" certificate. I would like for similar certificates to be issued by organisations from the LGBTQ+ communities and that it would be some kind of a sign that people from this group can feel safe in this particular place. That they will receive all the necessary information and all the help in case they need it.

Many librarians are aware of their role in residents' lives, especially in smaller places. Most people who participated in this research indicated the need to organise more trainings that would help them function even better and adapt to the needs of people who would like to perceive libraries as inclusive places that promote diversity and tolerance. Bearing in mind that this research was an introduction to deeper considerations in this subject and initiating a discussion in the Polish scientific literature, it is worth including in these observations not only a larger number of librarians but also people working in other cultural institutions.

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Abstract

Purpose: This article discusses the research results on how the information needs of the LGBTQ+ community can be satisfied by the librarians in Poland. The inspiration for conducting these observations was the research conducted in the United States by John Siegel, Martin Morris and Gregg A. Stevens back in January 2020 that was published in the "College & Research Libraries". It is important to highlight that, until today, no one in Poland has engaged themselves in this subject. The study's main aim was to check how librarians approach meeting the selected needs of people from the LGBTQ+ community and what knowledge they have in this area.

Methodology: The research used a survey questionnaire to identify problems that librarians working in different types of libraries encounter on a daily basis. It allowed us to identify problems that librarians working in different library types face daily. 716 participants took part in the research. Factor analysis was performed for selected questions. It was also checked whether there is a relationship between the respondents' comfort level with meeting information needs, gender and place of residence.

Results: During the study, 716 responses were received from librarians working in various types of libraries in Poland, of which the largest number of questionnaires were completed by employees of public libraries (560; 78.2%). Factor analysis conducted in relation to the most important terms related to the LGBTQ+ community confirmed knowledge of only selected concepts. In-depth studies were also conducted in relation to questions in which librarians were to assess their level of comfort in meeting selected information needs. The results showed that employees of larger libraries cope better in this area and have greater openness.

Keywords: library, diversity, openness, inclusiveness, information needs, LGBTQ+

Polscy bibliotekarze wobec zaspokajania potrzeb informacyjnych społeczności LGBTQ+

Streszczenie

Cel: Artykuł zawiera omówienie wyników badań dotyczących zaspokajania potrzeb informacyjnych osób ze społeczności LGBTQ+ przez bibliotekarzy w Polsce. Inspiracją do przeprowadzenia obserwacji były badania przeprowadzone w Stanach Zjednoczonych przez Johna Siegela, Martina Morrisa i Gregga A. Stevensa, opublikowane w styczniu 2020 roku na łamach 'College & Research Libraries'. Warto podkreślić, iż do tej pory na gruncie polskim, nikt nie zajmował się tą tematyką. Głównym celem badań było sprawdzenie, w jaki sposób bibliotekarze podchodzą do zaspokajania wybranych potrzeb osób ze społeczności LGBTQ+ oraz jaką wiedzą w tym zakresie dysponują.

Metodologia: Badania za pomocą kwestionariusza ankietowego pozwoliły na zidentyfikowanie problemów, z którymi na co dzień spotykają się bibliotekarze pracujący w różnych typach bibliotek. Zgodnie z ustaleniami amerykańskich badaczy, przeprowadzono analizę czynnikową dla wybranych zagadnień. Sprawdzono również, czy istnieje związek między poziomem komfortu respondentów, płcią i miejscem zamieszkania.

Rezultaty: W toku prowadzonych badań otrzymano 716 odpowiedzi od bibliotekarzy pracujących w różnych typach bibliotek w Polsce, z czego najwięcej kwestionariuszy wypełnili pracownicy bibliotek publicznych (560; 78,2%). Przeprowadzona w odniesieniu do najważniejszych terminów dotyczących społeczności LGBTQ+ analiza czynnikowa potwierdziła znajomość tylko wybranych pojęć. Badania pogłębione zostały przeprowadzone także w odniesieniu do pytań, w których bibliotekarze mieli ocenić poziom swojego komfortu w czasie realizacji wybranych potrzeb informacyjnych. Wyniki pokazały, że pracownicy większych bibliotek lepiej radzą sobie w tym zakresie i dysponują większą otwartością.

Słowa kluczowe: biblioteka, różnorodność, otwartość, inkluzywność, potrzeby informacyjne, LGBTQ+