



Oh Dear, We're Queer: Work/Life Balance & Library School during COVID-19

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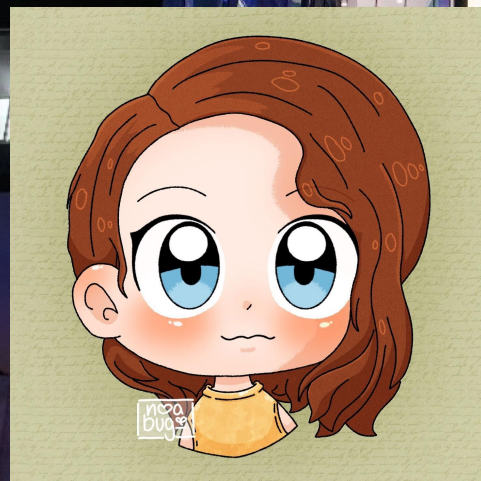
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Learning Objectives

1. Barriers to education and professional development encountered by queer library workers.
2. How those three barriers were exacerbated by COVID-19.
3. Potential actions to address education barriers encountered by marginalized people.
4. Discuss strategies to address inequities in the workplace that disproportionately affect queer and other marginalized people with their colleagues.

Investigations

- Performing Gender
- “Professionalism”
- All the Lonely People

Positionality

Our experiences are influenced by our position as two white, queer library workers, and there are a host of additional barriers felt by queer library workers whose experiences exist at the intersections of race, gender & sexuality, economic class, and ability. This presentation reflects our experiences and will not reflect the experiences of all queer library workers.



Performing Gender



- Libraries have inherited an iconic, whimsical, and complex series of gender stereotypes, inequities, and contradictions.
- Zoom and working from home (WFH) are new mediums to perform gender.
- New mediums require additional time and energy to learn and acclimate.

Performing Gender

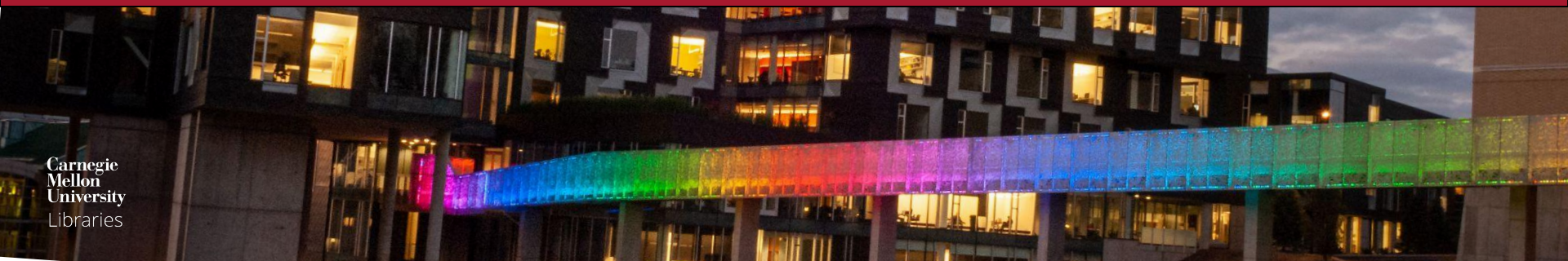
- Navigating gender presentation created different expectations between Zoom and in-person.
- WFH and Zoom forces people to perform gender AND observe their own gender presentation.
- The trauma of the pandemic has affected norms and standards to which we are held and to which we hold ourselves.

Performing Gender

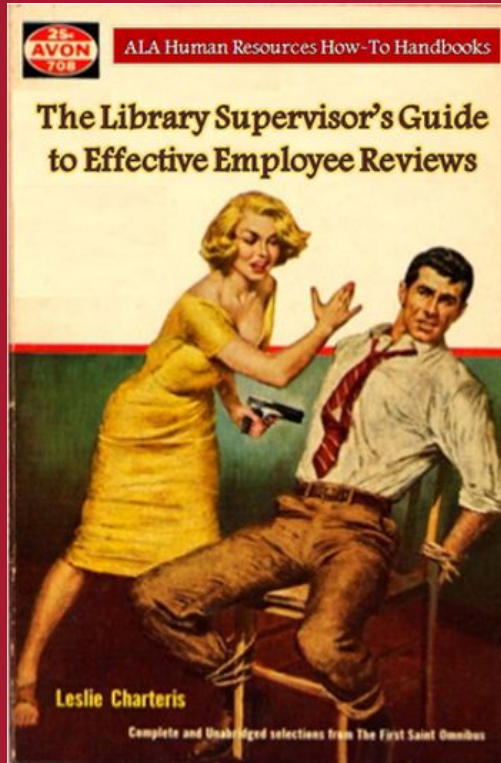
- Corporate and institutional acknowledgement of Pride and LGBTQIA+ grew substantially from 2020-2021.
- While bigotry against Trans people has grown, Trans rights have become major area of public discourse.
- Colleagues and allies provided major professional and emotional support to overcome barriers confronting queer people as communication improved following the initial shutdown.

Performing Gender

- Be as visible as possible (if safe to do so) in performing and exploring gender.
- Be vocal when workplace situations cause gender dysphoria (if safe to do so).
- Find trusted colleagues who can be supportive in your performance of gender.



“Professionalism”



- Libraries and the Academy in the United States have a history rooted in inequities and bigotries that continues today.
- “Professionalism” is often used as coded language to target marginalized groups, chilling speech and representation.
- COVID-19 has led to closures, restructurings, hiring freezes, layoffs, and terminations across industries.

“Professionalism”

- The rapid pivot to WFH changed office dynamics and created poorly defined performance expectations.
- The confusion and danger of the pandemic created a chilling effect on conversations regarding human and worker rights, as well as other conversations of workflows and mission.
- Addressing barriers to navigating professional and educational resources became tertiary priority in favor of maintaining services.

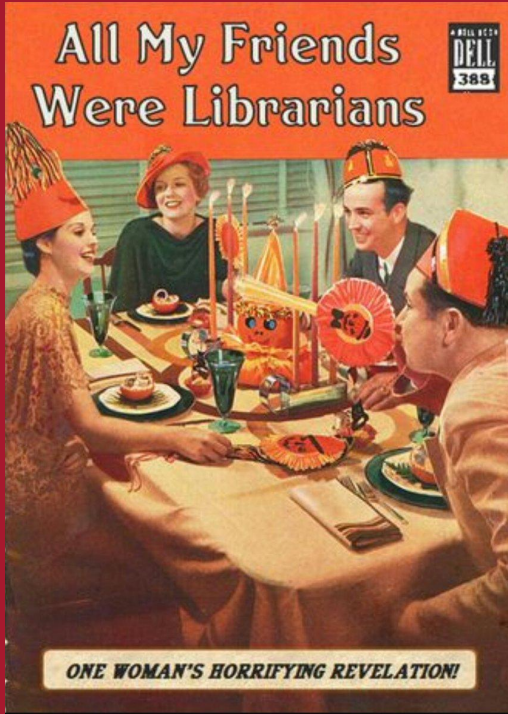
“Professionalism”

- In Jun 15, 2020 R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes Inc. v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, et al. created workplace protections for LGBTQIA+ workers in the USA & Pennsylvania.
- That protection, while not enshrined in law, created a degree of protection, allowed more conversation and visibility.
- This communication and presence allowed for more open and direct conversation about the priorities and goals.

“Professionalism”

- Establish boundaries - what “norms” of professionalism are colleagues upholding that you can stand against?
- Break boundaries of professionalism.
- Support and respect others as the transgress those boundaries.

All the Lonely People



- Queer people face intersectional barriers to social services, medical & mental healthcare, education, employment, housing, financial services, and family support.
- Queer people must construct their own formal and informal networks to thrive.
- The pandemic has decimated those relationships by decreasing visibility.

All the Lonely People

- COVID-19 put unprecedented strain on all people and stymied access to already limited resources, particularly amongst marginalized people.
- Workplaces, where people spend ~23% of their lives, were unable to provide forums where people of shared experience can communicate and organize.
- The lack of community and visibility has significant, but difficult to quantify costs and repercussions.

All the Lonely People

- Casual communication through various platforms provided the only method of support.
- After the deployment of the vaccine the ability to communicate and access other human beings began to improve dramatically for some.
- As access to community and queer visibility improved so too did the capacity of community members to address the new and ongoing issues that they face.

All the Lonely People

- Break the silence.
- Less DEI, more action.
- Create safer workplace environments for employees from marginalized communities; creates pipelines for representation.

Conclusions

Experiencing these issues during the workday can lead to emotional burnout that can make library school increasingly difficult

These are only a small amount of the problems faced by library workers from marginalized communities - listen, be active, be willing to fight for change.





Thank you!

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