Drag Queen Storytimes

Public Library Staff Perceptions and Experiences

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Since their first appearances in public libraries, drag queen storytimes[1] (DQS) have frequently been featured in news stories and professional literature. These events feature drag performers leading various aspects of otherwise typical storytimes, including reading books, singing songs, and leading crafts and other activities with young children and their families.

Michelle Tea and RADAR Productions are credited with initiating this phenomenon with the establishment of Drag Queen Story Hour (DQSH) in 2015.[2] Since then, similar events, often but not always under the DQSH umbrella, have been held in bookstores, schools, museums, and public libraries across the country and beyond.[3]

According to the DQSH website, these events "[celebrate] learning and play, encouraging kids to celebrate gender diversity and all kinds of difference, while building confidence in expressing themselves."[4] Library staff who have hosted DQS view them as providing representative and inclusive programs for "rainbow families" (families with LGBTQ+ parents/caregivers and/or children), as well as encouraging diversity, acceptance, gender creativity, and individuality.[5]

Unlike other children's programs in public libraries, DQS have garnered significant amounts of attention from individual patrons, community groups, local politicians, and the media. This attention ranges from strong support to vehement opposition, sometimes within the same community.[6]

Given the potential benefits of these programs and the protests they can spur, it is imperative to better understand whether, how, and why they are implemented in libraries, as well as how library staff perceive them. DQS function as an important context that contributes to literature on the relationship between libraries and LGBTQ+ communities, given that said relationship has historically been fraught.[7] Understanding library staff motivations for and perceptions of hosting DQS also provides insight into larger conversations about the field's values, power, and decision-making, such as whether libraries can or should be neutral.[8]

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While some professional and scholarly works have addressed DQS,[9] they have focused almost exclusively on libraries that have hosted or have planned to host such programs. Missing are the accounts of those who have not hosted DQS, including those who may have considered but ultimately decided not to host a DQS event.

Current Study

This study explored public library staff perceptions of and experiences with DQS, including those who work at libraries that have and have not hosted DQS in the past.

Data Collection

We developed a survey with both closed and open-ended questions to capture library staff experiences with and perceptions of DQS. We piloted the survey with a small group of participants to test its reliability and revised as needed before dissemination. We collected data via Qualtrics, an online survey tool.

We engaged in a two-prong recruitment strategy. The first prong was a stratified random sample of three public libraries in each US state and territory. To collect email addresses for the survey invitation, we conducted stratified random sampling on a list of public libraries inventoried by the most recent IMLS Public Libraries Survey.[10] We then located the library websites for each selected institution and identified the email address of either a children's librarian or the director if the former was not available.

In case email recipients were not actually involved in their libraries' children's services, we asked them to forward the recruitment email to appropriate library staff members. We determined that three libraries per state was an appropriate recruitment number based on study time constraints. We also recruited participants purposively by email invitations sent to professional and institutional listservs, including those affiliated with the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), Intellectual Freedom Roundtable, and the Public Library Association (PLA).

The survey was open for responses for two weeks in August–September 2019.

Data Analysis

Once the survey closed, we imported the data into Excel and generated pivot tables summing responses across question categories for closed-response questions. We then performed statistical tests to determine whether responses varied among respondents from institutions that have hosted DQS and those that have not hosted DQS. If we found a significant variation, we also determined the magnitude of the variation.[11]

We analyzed qualitative responses to open-ended survey questions using the constant comparative method, progressing from open to focused coding.[12] We engaged in peer debriefing to increase the trustworthiness of our analyses.[13]

Participants

Four hundred and fifty-eight library staff members responded to the survey. Respondents were primarily middle-aged, ages 31–50 (n = 260, 57%) and 51 or over (n = 109, 24%). Almost three-quarters of participants reported having very liberal (n = 211, 45%) and liberal (n = 124, 27%) personal political views. While slightly more than half of participants did not consider themselves to be LGBTQ+ (n = 234, 51%), a significant minority identified as LGBTQ+ (n = 149, 33%) or unsure (n = 44, 9%). Respondents represented all major regions of the US, with respondents' libraries located in the Northeastern (n = 180, 39%), Midwestern (n = 100, 22%), Western (n = 110, 24%), and Southern (n = 54, 12%) US regions. Five (1%) respondents were from Canada. Two participants (>1%) did not respond and seven (2%) preferred not to answer.

Nearly half of respondents (49%) indicated that they worked directly in children's services, either in staff or supervisory positions, and 13% of respondents indicated that they worked in library administration. Most respondents reported being in a position to make programming decisions for their library (n = 387, 84%).

Key Findings

The majority of respondents work at a library that has not hosted a DQS in the past (n = 341, 74%; referred to hereafter as "non-hosts"), and the remaining 117 respondents (26%) work at a library that has hosted at least one DQS event (referred to hereafter as "hosts"). Included among the non-hosts are five respondents who noted that their libraries were currently in the planning stages of their first DQS and four respondents who reported that their library had "scheduled a DQSH, but it was canceled due to complaints."

Most respondents (n = 447, 98%) indicated previously seeing news stories about DQS. Exposure to news stories did not significantly differ between hosts (n = 115, 98%) and non-hosts (n = 332, 97%).

Of all respondents, 125 (37%) indicated personally attending a DQS. There was a significant difference between hosts and non-hosts, with a greater number of hosts reporting personally attending a DQS (n = 100, 85%) than non-hosts (n = 25, 7%). This difference is likely due in part to the fact that many hosts attended the DQS that was held at their own libraries.

Hosts' Experiences

Frequency of DQS

Half of hosts indicated their library hosted a one-time DQS event (n = 59, 50%). Thirteen respondents (11%) reported that their libraries hosted DQS annually, eleven respondents (9%) reported that they host DQS multiple times a year, four respondents (3%) reported that their libraries host DQS monthly, and one respondent (1%) reported that their library hosts DQS every other week. Eighteen respondents (15%) reported that their libraries have hosted DQS multiple times, though not always on a set schedule and sometimes as "an occasional 'special' program." Four respondents (3%) indicated that their library has hosted DQS once at multiple branches of their library systems. Six respondents (5%) reported that their library has hosted DQS once but has plans to do so again in the future. In addition to reporting the frequency with which their libraries have hosted DQS, five respondents noted that their library hosts DQS in conjunction with Pride month.

Initiators of DQS

In most cases, library staff initiated the storytime held at respondents' libraries (n = 90, 74%), followed by local LGBTQ+ organizations (n = 20, 16%), and national organizations like DQSH (n = 7, 6%). Others reported to have initiated DQS include library patrons (n = 3), local politicians (n = 3), individual drag performers from the community (n = 2), a local organization (n = 1), and library administration (n = 1). Six respondents were unsure who had initiated the DQS at their library.

Funding of DQS

Over half of hosts (n = 63, 54%) indicated that they did not receive financial support for DQS. Twenty-six percent of hosts (n = 31) reported receiving financial support, and 20% (n = 24) reported being unsure if their institution received such support. The most commonly reported source of financial support was the library's Friends of the Library group (n = 17), followed by private donations (n = 8), grant funding (n = 3), local government (n = 2) or organizations (n = 2), and the DQSH organization (n = 1). Only five respondents indicated that their DQS was supported by their programming or library budget.

Most hosts (n = 91, 78%) reported that their libraries did not face financial barriers to hosting DQS or were unsure about these barriers (n = 18, 15%). Only eight hosts (7%) reported that their libraries faced financial barriers. Seven respondents reported budgetary constraints as a barrier, with one respondent noting, "There is only so much programming money. Hosting drag queen storytime more often would reduce other offerings." Four respondents reported concerns about using "tax dollars to pay for the program."

Promotion of DQS

Almost all (94%) hosts reported that their libraries promoted the event. In an open-ended question, hosts were asked to describe the ways in which their libraries promoted DQS. The most common methods of promotion included print flyers, posters, bookmarks, and brochures (n = 75, 68%); social media (n = 73, 66%); library calendar (n = 37, 34%); library website (n = 39, 35%); library newsletter (n = 22, 20%); word of mouth (n = 14, 13%), and local media (n = 12; 11%).

Several hosts noted that they promoted DQS "the same way that all of our programs are promoted." Other hosts articulated differences due to anticipated and/or experienced reactions. For example, one respondent noted, "We did not put our event on our social media pages, as that was how local protest groups found similar events in our area to protest." Another reported that their library promoted the event "briefly on Facebook (until online pushback caused us to stop promoting the events there)."

One respondent noted that community backlash actually helped promote the event at their library. "The library director was interviewed by several local news outlets, and protest groups (unwittingly) spread the news further."

Support for DQS

Hosts indicated a variety of ways in which their libraries provided support for DQS. Nearly all hosts provided a room/reading space for the event (n = 116, 99%) as well as publicity/advertising (n = 110, 94%). Other common types of support included physical books that were read during storytime (n = 91, 78%), suggestions for books to be read during storytime (n = 82, 70%), financial compensation for the performer who led storytime (n = 76, 65%), suggestions for activities (songs, crafts, etc.) to be used during storytime (n = 73, 62%), materials needed for activities that were used during storytime (n = 71, 61%), security in and/or around the library during the storytime (n = 50, 43%), and tips or training for performers on storytime best practices (n = 50, 43%).

In addition, several hosts noted that drag performers did not have total responsibility for the events held at their libraries. Four respondents stated that library staff helped in leading the DQS along with the drag performers, and six respondents reported library staff involvement in planning the events.

Three respondents reported that the drag performers who lead storytime at their libraries did not need training from library staff due to their preexisting knowledge and experiences. One respondent noted that "Our queen has a background in early childhood education/literacy," while another said, "Our queens were elementary school teachers and did not need 'training'."

Non-hosts' Experiences

Contacted about Hosting

Among non-hosts, more than half reported never being contacted about hosting DQS (n = 191, 56%), while 28% (n = 94) of non-hosts were unsure whether their library had been contacted. Sixteen percent (n = 53) of non-hosts reported that their libraries had been contacted about hosting a DQS, specifically by local LGBTQ+ organizations (n = 14), library patrons (n = 9), national organizations such as DQSH (n = 4), community members (n = 4), drag performers (n = 7), staff from their own and other libraries (n = 7), as well as the state library (n = 1). It is important to note that not all non-hosts were contacted by those in support of DQS. For example, one respondent reported being contacted by a community member who was opposed to the library holding a DQS, and one respondent reported being contacted by a conservative group who was also opposed.

Financial Supports and Barriers

Non-hosts were asked if they had been offered financial support for DQS. Most (n = 239, 71%) reported not being offered support, 27% (n = 93) reported being unsure as to whether their institution had been offered this support, and 2% (n = 7) indicated being offered support. Such support was reported to have been offered by potential performers (n = 3), Friends of the Library groups (n = 2), private donations (n = 1), and a local LGBT+ organization (n = 1).

Most non-host respondents reported that their institutions do not face financial barriers to hosting DQS (n = 229, 68%) or reported being unsure as to whether their institutions faced these barriers (n = 80, 24%). Only thirty respondents (9%) indicated that their library faces financial barriers to hosting DQS. The most frequently reported barrier was budgetary constraints (n = 20). Other barriers included administrative resistance (n = 5), lack of grant funding (n = 3), and concerns related to using tax dollars for what some perceived as "programming that is seen as condoning an alternative lifestyle" (n = 1).

Likelihood of Future Hosting

When asked if they thought their library was likely to host a DQS in the future, more than half of non-hosts either indicated that this was unlikely (n = 89, 27%) or extremely unlikely (n = 83, 25%). Almost one-third of non-hosts reported their library being neither likely nor unlikely to host a DQS event (n = 96, 29%). A small number of non-hosts reported feeling that their library was likely (n = 47, 14%) or extremely likely (n = 20, 6%) to host a DQS in the future.

Perceptions of DQS

We asked all respondents a variety of questions to gauge their perceptions of DQS and the intersection of LGBTQ+ issues and libraries. In this section, we compare responses between hosts and non-hosts based on whether there is a statistically significant difference between responses, as well as the size of this difference, which is referred to as an "effect size" and can be small, moderate, or large. The larger the effect size, the bigger the difference between host and non-host responses.

Stakeholder Support

Respondents were asked to indicate how supportive they felt the following stakeholders in their library's location were of DQS: library staff, library administration, library board of trustees, community members, local government, and local religious organizations. Response categories participants could choose from were "not at all supportive," "somewhat supportive," "moderately supportive," "very supportive," "extremely supportive," and "not sure". The majority of responses (defined as more than half of responses) by both hosts and non-hosts indicated that library staff, library administration, and the surrounding community ranged from being "moderately supportive" to "extremely supportive" of DQS. Perceptions of support from board of trustees, local government, and local religious organizations were mixed.

These mixed responses could be explained when comparing host and non-host responses. For all response items save "moderately supportive" and "not sure," significant differences with moderate effect sizes were present across all stakeholder groups. Specifically, non-hosts typically reported a perceived lack of support from stakeholders across the board, while hosts reported that all stakeholder categories with the exception of religious organizations were very to extremely supportive. The proportion of hosts and non-hosts reporting each stakeholder group as "moderately supportive" did not vary across respondents for all stakeholder categories with the exception of local government and religious organizations. When it comes to these two stakeholder groups, both hosts and non-hosts reported low levels of support, with hosts indicating slightly larger levels of moderate support or being uncertain of support levels.

Alignment with Library Mission

Respondents were asked if they think DQS align with their library's mission and values and with other programs and services offered by their library. Response categories for this and subsequent questions were "strongly disagree," "disagree," "agree," "strongly agree," and "undecided." The majority of respondents from each group agreed or strongly agreed that DQS aligned with their libraries' mission and values and with their libraries' other programs and services. However, this agreement varied between hosts and non-hosts. There was a significant difference with a large effect size between respondents who strongly agreed to both questions, with hosts more often reporting strong agreement as compared to non-hosts. However, non-hosts still agreed with both statements, which suggests that differences in agreement varied only slightly by degree. In other words, both groups agreed with the statement, but hosts tended to strongly agree whereas non-hosts tended to agree.

Among both groups, there also were significant differences with moderate effect sizes among respondents disagreeing with both survey items. Specifically, non-hosts more often disagreed with both statements as compared to hosts. For the question that asked whether DQS aligned with the library's mission and values, there was a significant difference with a moderate effect size between non-hosts and hosts regarding being "undecided," with non-hosts more often reporting this indecision.

Library Safety and Budget

Next, respondents were asked if they think DQS affect library safety and are feasible within the library budget. Perceptions regarding library safety were mixed among both groups; there were no significant differences in the number of respondents when comparing hosts and non-hosts. The majority of respondents across both categories either strongly agreed or agreed that DQS was feasible within the library budget. There were significant differences with moderate effect sizes among hosts, who more often indicated strong agreement regarding

budget feasibility and indicated less indecision of whether DQS was feasible within the library budget as compared to non-hosts.

Community

The next series of questions addressed respondents' perceptions of DQS among their communities. Specifically, respondents were asked if they perceive DQS as: aligned with their community's demographics; supported by their community; and reflective of mainstream religious beliefs of their community. In all cases, responses to categories were mixed.

The majority of responses to the question regarding community demographics from both groups indicated indecision. However, responses exhibited significant variation with moderate to large effect sizes across responses from hosts and non-hosts. Specifically, hosts more often indicated strong agreement and agreement to this question, whereas non-hosts more often reported strong disagreement, disagreement, and indecision.

There are significant differences among all responses for hosts and non-hosts regarding whether DQS reflects the mainstream religious beliefs of their communities. Moderate to large effect sizes denote that non-hosts more often disagree and strongly disagree with the statement, while hosts are more likely to agree. A small effect size is present for the difference in strong agreement with this survey item; however, the n-values or number of responses in this category are small (under 10) for both hosts and non-hosts. There is also a moderate effect size in the difference between undecided responses; specifically, hosts express more indecision than non-hosts.

Both hosts and non-hosts express similar rates of indecision related to whether DQS reflects the mainstream political ideology of their communities. However, all other survey items indicate significant differences in the amount of responses with moderate to large effect sizes. Namely, hosts more often strongly agree or agree with this statement, while non-hosts more often disagree or strongly disagree.

Child Development

The next series of questions asked respondents for their perceptions of the relationship between DQS and child development. The majority of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed that DQS supports healthy child development and positively influences children's understanding of gender and/or sexuality; however, there were significant differences with small to moderate effect sizes between hosts and non-hosts.

Specifically, there was a moderate difference between hosts who strongly agreed that DQS positively influences children's understanding of gender and/or sexuality and supports healthy child development as compared to non-hosts. Non-hosts instead had a slightly higher likelihood of either

disagreeing, strongly disagreeing, or exhibiting indecision with both statements.

Social Inclusion, Diversity, and Acceptance

The next question asked respondents for their perceptions as to whether DQS encouraged social inclusion, diversity, and acceptance. Most respondents either strongly agreed or agreed. There was a significant difference with a moderate effect size between hosts and non-hosts, with hosts more likely to indicate strong agreement with this statement than non-hosts. However, non-hosts indicated agreement with the statement slightly more than hosts, suggesting that both responses across both categories exhibited agreement, but that it varied in degree from agreement (non-hosts) to strong agreement (hosts). There were significant differences with small effect sizes among non-hosts and hosts in responses exhibiting disagreement or indecision—with non-hosts slightly more likely to report both.

Intellectual Freedom

The next question asked respondents for their perceptions as to whether DQS support intellectual freedom. The majority of all respondents reported strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement. Significant differences with large and moderate effect sizes were present and reflected degree of agreement, with non-hosts tending to agree with the statement as compared to hosts, who indicated strong agreement. There were also significant differences with small effect sizes among the proportion of responses indicating disagreement and indecision to the question, with non-hosts more often indicating both. However, the overall proportion of responses indicating disagreement and indecision across both groups were relatively low as compared to those indicating agreement and strong agreement.

LGBTQ+ Inclusive Spaces, Collections, and Services

A final series of questions asked respondents to indicate their degree of comfort offering a variety of spaces, collections, and services that are LGBTQ+ inclusive. Response categories were "uncomfortable, and would not do it," "uncomfortable, but would do it," "moderately comfortable," "comfortable," and "not sure."

The majority of respondents across both categories indicated feeling comfortable engaging in the following activities: adding materials to their children's collection containing positive representation of LGBTQ+ topics, letting an LGBTQ+ organization hold a meeting at the library, and addressing a reference request from a child pertaining to or discussing LGBTQ+ content in a way that supports LGBTQ+ communities. In each case, there was a significant difference with a small effect size between reported feelings of comfort, with hosts slightly more likely to indicate comfort with each activity. The two questions dealing with children also exhibited significant differences with small effect sizes in the proportion

of "uncomfortable, but would do it" responses, with this response more common among non-hosts.

Most respondents also indicated feeling comfortable having an affirmative LGBTQ+ book display in the children's section and letting drag performers rent meeting space to put on a DQS at the library. However, the distribution of these responses was more variable when comparing hosts and non-hosts. For both items, there was a significant difference with moderate effect size between the larger proportion of responses indicating comfort with the aforementioned activities among hosts as compared to non-hosts. For the survey item related to having an affirmative LGBTQ+ book display in the children's section, there was a significant difference with a small effect size between non-hosts reporting being moderately comfortable with the activity or uncomfortable and not engaging in this activity.

For the survey item related to letting drag queens use library meeting space to host a DQS,[14] responses were mixed among non-hosts. Specifically, the proportion of responses from this group indicating moderate comfort, being unsure, being uncomfortable but willing to do it, and being uncomfortable and unwilling to do it, were slightly higher, as evidenced by a significant difference with a small effect size, when compared to host responses.

The lowest response rates indicating comfort across both groups were for the following activities: hosting and/or sponsoring a DQS at the library and promoting and/or marketing DQS. Still, slightly over half of all respondents indicated being comfortable with both activities. However, there were variations between hosts and non-hosts. Specifically, hosts indicated that they felt more comfortable putting on a DQS, while non-hosts more frequently reported feeling discomfort or unwillingness to host. Similarly, hosts reported feeling more comfortable with promoting and/or marketing DQS than non-hosts. Non-hosts more often indicated that they felt discomfort and subsequent unwillingness to promote and/or market a DQS.

For Further Discussion

The results address our research aim to investigate public library staff experiences with and perceptions of DQS by offering several important observations, areas for future work, and emergent suggestions for public libraries currently or considering hosting DQS.

Library Staff Experiences with DQS

First, findings demonstrate that most respondents do not have experience hosting or attending a DQS. This large representation of non-hosts, who comprised 74 percent of all respondents, represents a major contribution of this study to the literature on DQS, which has centered on host experiences

and perspectives. Despite most respondents reporting not hosting or attending a DQS, awareness seems to be high as evidenced by almost all respondents having seen news stories about the event. Therefore, one avenue for future work is to explore possible connections between exposure to DQS media and perceptions of DQS. Further, 20 percent of non-hosts indicated a strong likelihood of planning a future DQS, indicating a potential need for more work on how to best plan for such an event.

Among hosts, there was a split in responses indicating that DQS was a one-time event versus a more consistent form of programming. This divide in responses may reflect larger perceptions of whether DQS is considered a "trend" or a "fad," or has the potential to be integrated into library storytimes in the long term.

Overwhelmingly DQS was initiated by library staff rather than bodies outside of the library, such as local LGBTQ+ organizations. This was also reflected by non-hosts, who mostly indicated that they were not contacted about hosting a DQS. This finding suggests the importance of library staff perceptions regarding DQS; specifically, if DQS generally is staff-initiated, then it is likely that the event will not occur if library staff are not on board. It also denotes the potential for increased collaboration between local LGBTQ+ organizations, national organizations like DQSH, and library staff. Staff may not recognize there is a need for DQS unless they are reaching out to and engaging with LGBTQ+ individuals in their communities.

Perhaps surprisingly, hosts did not report high levels of promoting DQS among local LGBTQ+ organizations, at Pride events, or via word of mouth. Instead, most event promotions came from in-library brochures and social media posts. Given the aim of DQS to include "rainbow families," and some respondents' qualitative reports of unwanted social media visibility, one suggestion would be to enhance targeted promotion efforts within local LGBTQ+ communities. This targeted promotion ties into the prior suggestion of enhanced outreach and engagement with LGBTQ+ communities during the initial planning stages.

Regarding findings related to library staff experiences with DQS, quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that most host libraries assist drag performers in terms of book and activity suggestions. This finding, coupled with qualitative data describing hosts that work with performers who have experience with early childhood education, suggests that many libraries are centering DQS within established storytime and literacy best practices.

Library Staff Perceptions of DQS

Results show that most respondents (both hosts and non-hosts) are supportive of DQS and, more broadly, LGBTQ+

representation in libraries. This finding is particularly evidenced when survey items allow for differences between "strong agreement" and "agreement" among respondents who have and have not hosted; both groups are often in agreement, though they may vary in the degree of agreement. Such broad support for DQS cannot be generalized to all library staff given the non-representativeness of the survey sample, yet it is nonetheless encouraging to see support for various forms of LGBTQ+ inclusion in libraries as well.

Although we did not specifically ask respondents to indicate or explain the reasons for hosting or not hosting DQS, comparisons between hosts and non-hosts can allow us to identify differences and provide some insight into various factors that may be important considerations when deciding whether to host DQS. Based on the format of our survey, we cannot claim that these factors were causative, but they may be related to such decision-making.

The first salient factor is alignment of DQS with the library's mission and values. While the overwhelming majority of hosts perceived DQS as aligning with their library's mission and values, reports from non-hosts were more fraught with 20 percent reporting indecision. This suggests that clarifying how DQS aligns with the library's mission and values could constitute one of the ways to make the case for DQS, particularly given that non-hosts reported less support from library staff, administration, and the board of trustees for DQS as compared to hosts.

Stakeholder support thus constituted another key difference in perceptions between hosts and non-hosts. Outside of the library, hosts also reported more perceived support from their community for DQS than non-hosting institutions, though it is difficult to know if perceptions of support (or lack thereof) match actual support levels.

In other words, non-hosts may fear a lack of community support where there is, in fact, some such support present. Furthermore, this begs the question of who is included in perceptions of "community," particularly whether LGBTQ+ persons are recognized as members of one's community. For instance, another significant finding is that hosts and non-hosts differed in their perceptions of whether DQS aligned with their community's demographics, religious beliefs, and political ideology. Hosts were more likely to report agreement or strong agreement of this alignment as compared to non-hosts, who were more likely to disagree, strongly disagree, or be undecided. This perceived lack of alignment again may not reflect reality, as it is important to recognize that LGBTQ+ individuals reside in all types of communities, and they may be erased by those who perceive a lack of community support for DQS (though it is also true that not all LGBTQ+ individuals unreservedly support DQS). These observations relate to the need for library outreach and engagement to LGBTQ+ communities in general, as they may have needs that currently go unaddressed or unadvertised by the library.

Interestingly, lack of outreach and engagement to community organizations may also be working in an inverse fashion when it comes to religious organizations. Specifically, hosts report more indecision related to whether DQS is supported by religious organizations, whereas non-hosts report a higher proportion of perceived lack of support. Given the mixed results of this survey item, it would be worthwhile in future research to further tease out the relationship between libraries and religious organizations when it comes to hosting DQS or offering LGBTQ+ services, spaces, and collections more generally.

An additional potential contributing factor to decision-making relates to concerns about the impacts of DQS on child development and perceived comfort and willingness with the respondent's library hosting and promoting DQS. Non-hosts were more likely to disagree, strongly disagree, or be undecided regarding whether DQS supported healthy child development and positively influenced children's understanding of gender and/or sexuality than hosts. However, these concerns were prevalent in a little less than half of respondents, with the other half reporting agreement or strong agreement with both statements. These findings are particularly interesting when coupled with host and non-host reporting of perceived comfort with various LGBTQ+ related services, spaces, and collections geared toward children.

Across both groups, most reported support of these services, spaces, and collections when related to LGBTQ+ topics more generally, but there were significant and large differences in perceived comfort when it came to the library's direct involvement in hosting and promoting DQS, with non-hosts indicating less comfort with these activities. Interestingly, a majority of non-hosts reported agreement or strong agreement with statements connecting healthy child development and children's positive understanding of gender and sexuality to DQS, as well as comfort with hosting and promoting DQS.

This finding therefore suggests a potential disconnect between library staff perspectives of DQS and comfort with visibly hosting one. Future work can explore this connection with qualitative interviews that ask direct questions about this relationship.

There were also some factors present in which host and non-host perspectives were undifferentiated and/or mixed. Few respondents reported experiencing or perceiving financial barriers to hosting DQS. Although this suggests that financial barriers may not be a key constraint to hosting DQS, further investigation is needed to determine the prevalence and importance of arguments connecting DQS to taxpayer dollars, particularly if this connection is a misperception as evidenced by the survey data, which indicates that DQS funding among hosts tends to come from outside of the library's budget.

In addition, it would be worthwhile to follow up with hosts providing security for DQS to determine if any relationship

exists between the presence of security and/or police and financial barriers. On this related topic of whether a relationship between library safety and DQS exists, responses across both groups are mixed and undifferentiated, suggesting the need for further qualitative investigation to elicit some of the nuanced contextual and situational elements likely at work in shaping perceptions of this relationship.

Most respondents noted that DQS supported intellectual freedom. This finding suggests that advocating for DQS at one's library may be bolstered by making this connection visible. However, this item requires further investigation given that simply because a program supports intellectual freedom does not mean that library staff will necessarily want to offer it, particularly if it is considered controversial. Therefore, issues related to self-censorship should be explored as they relate to DQS in further work.

Limitations

As with all research, there are limitations in our study. For example, those library staff who chose to participate were likely to feel strongly about DQS, either positively or negatively. This means that our survey findings may not be reflective of the perspectives of those who feel less strongly or are ambivalent about these programs.

Another limitation is that not all library staff who responded to the survey are in a position to make decisions about library programming; therefore, their responses might not be reflective of the actual decision-making processes that happened at their libraries. Additionally, a minority of respondents reported having actually attended a DQS; this indicates that, for those who have not attended a DQS, their responses are based on second-hand information rather than personal experience. Relatedly, this survey elicited perceptions of DQS, meaning that these perceptions may not reflect what is actually occurring within libraries. This observation is illustrated in survey items with a sizable proportion of "unsure" responses. Future work can attend to this shortcoming by using additional methods, such as analysis of DQS media coverage and semi-structured interviews with hosts and non-hosts.

Conclusion

The results of this survey give much needed insight into the perspectives and experiences of public library staff who work at libraries that have and have not hosted DQS. Each of the factors outlined in this survey, either on their own or in combination with other factors, may play a role in any given library's decision to host a DQS.

By comparing the perspectives and experiences of hosts and non-hosts, we can begin to understand the factors that may impact a library's decision to host a DQS. The perceptions

and experiences of each group are not homogenous; there is not a one-size-fits-all approach nor a singular point of view. The experiences of each library may be as diverse as the communities they serve.

Future work will explore these perspectives and experiences in more detail. Currently, the research team is conducting interviews with library staff who have and have not hosted DQS to learn more about the factors influencing decisions to host or not host these storytimes, the supports and challenges encountered when hosting them, strategies used to address these challenges, and how DQS may relate to existing library programs and services.

We are also conducting interviews with drag performers who have participated in DQS, and we plan to conduct an analysis of news coverage of DQS from its inception in 2015 to the present.

Especially in comparison to other children's storytimes, DQS spur debates between supporters and detractors of the programming on an international scale, and such debates highlight the role these programs play in wider conversations around LGBTQ+ visibility and inclusion in public institutions such as libraries. We hope that the findings of this study, as well as our future work, will better position library staff to make informed decisions regarding whether to include DQS in their program offerings. **&**

References

1. We use the phrase "drag queen storytimes" in our work, in keeping with the preferences of these performers who participate in these events. However, these storytimes are inclusive of other types of drag performers, such as drag kings.
2. "About," Drag Queen Story Hour, accessed Feb. 27, 2019, https://www.dragqueenstoryhour.org/about/.
3. "Chapters," Drag Queen Story Hour, accessed Feb. 27, 2019, https://www.dragqueenstoryhour.org/#events.
4. "Frequently Asked Questions," Drag Queen Story Hour, accessed Feb. 27, 2019, https://www.dragqueenstoryhour.org/faq/.
5. Jamie Campbell Naidoo, "A Rainbow of Creativity: Exploring Drag Queen Storytimes and Gender Creative Programming in Public Libraries," *Children & Libraries* 16, no. 4 (2018): 12–20; Rocco Staino, "Storytime Gets Fabulous," *School Library Journal* 63, no. 7 (2017): 14.
6. Jennifer Stickles, "Sparking the Ire, and the Support, of a Community: When a Public Library Program Becomes Something More," *Children & Libraries* 16, no. 4 (2018): 20–22.
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10. "Public Libraries Survey," Institute of Museum and Library Services, accessed July 22, 2019, https://www.imls.gov/research-evaluation/data-collection/public-libraries-survey.
11. More details on the specific statistical methods used and in-depth survey findings (including detailed tables showing frequency of responses, differences among responses, and the magnitude of these differences) can be found at https://tinyurl.com/1h1e3oji.
12. Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014).
13. Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985).
14. Although ALA's Library Bill of Rights indicates that libraries should not discriminate in policies regarding library meeting spaces, there are examples of such discrimination. For example, in 2019 the Five Forks Public Library in Greenville, SC, changed its meeting room policy shortly after a meeting room was reserved for a DQSH, so that it could then cancel the reservation; Daniel J. Gross and Haley Walters, "Drag Queen Story Hour: Greenville Event Re-approved after Cancellation," *Greenville News*, accessed January 7, 2021, https://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/2019/02/13/draq-queen-story-hour-greenville-county-library/2856957002/.