



Information Research – Vol. 31 No. ISIC (2026)

'I know a place': the informational value and loss of queer spaces

Vanessa Kitzie and Travis Wagner

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47989/ir31ISIC65157>

Abstract

Introduction. This study examines the informational functions of queer spaces (physical and digital) and the consequences of their loss for identity formation, community support, and information circulation.

Method. We conducted fifteen semi-structured Zoom interviews with US queer adults who had lost access to a queer space. Participants were recruited via convenience and snowball sampling and received a small honorarium.

Analysis. Interviews (mean 53 minutes) were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed using a six-step thematic analysis with an abductive coding approach. Iterative analysis generated three primary, interrelated themes that structure the findings.

Results. Queer spaces operate as information hubs that enable embodied information encountering, localised circulation, and grassroots information activism (e.g., archiving, resource curation, community networks). Loss of these spaces disrupted localised knowledge flows, hindered identity work, and forced redistribution of labour to digital and decentralised networks. Participants described strategies to sustain legacies, including social media archiving, community organising, and do-it-yourself resource sharing, yet noted challenges of fragmentation, gentrification, and threats of violence.

Conclusions. Findings highlight the need for localised, community-driven information provision and suggest roles for libraries, archives, and policymakers in preserving queer spaces and the information practices they sustain.

Introduction

'They will try to make you unhappy; don't let them. They will try to tell you you're not free, don't listen. I know a place where you don't need protection, even if it's only in my imagination' (MUNA, 2017).

These lyrics, written by the queer band MUNA, capture the imagined and material refuge queer spaces provide; sites where connection, safety, and freedom coexist, even if temporarily. Spaces of connection and safety are integral to building queer identity and community, as well as facilitating information flow. Examples of information-rich physical queer spaces include queer bars (Mattson, 2023), gay-straight student alliances (Lee, 2002), and performance art/activist groups (Wilcox, 2018). Digital parallels include bulletin board systems for those impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Brewster & Ruberg, 2020), queer-affirming microblogging platforms (Haimson et al., 2021), communities of practice centred around coming out (Ridder & Dhaenens, 2019), and amateur queer history accounts on social media (Wagner, 2024). While each space has unique subcultural practices, they provide integral reference points for queer inquiry, serving as central, if not singular, sites of information provision. We contend that spatial, social, and informational factors are intertwined; we cannot understand informational phenomena without understanding spatial and social characteristics (Cox & Fulton, 2021; Gray, 2009; Hardy, 2021; Savolainen, 2008). Distinguishing between abstract space and socially meaningful place allows information research to move beyond treating geography as a neutral container and instead recognise how meanings, identities, and information behaviours are co-constructed through place-based practice. As such, there are informational consequences when queer people acquire culture and knowledge in spaces that change or disappear.

Our study employs an information practices approach (Savolainen, 2008) to understand how queer spaces facilitate activities such as embodied information-seeking, circulation, and information activism, and what is lost when these spaces change or disappear. Rather than functioning merely as background settings, places actively shape and are shaped by information practices, producing distinct informational affordances whose loss carries material consequences for how people locate, share, and sustain knowledge (Cox & Fulton, 2021). The study reports on findings from 15 semi-structured interviews with queer adults across the US about their experiences of losing queer spaces. Findings extend advocacy and policy-based initiatives calling for the importance of queer spaces by contextualising their informational functions and considering how information institutions, including libraries and archives, can contribute to locating, preserving, and recreating queer spaces.

Literature review

Despite their multifaceted values, queer spaces are *'hard won'* and *'limited'* (Taylor, 2008, p. 526). Their ephemerality manifests in various forms, including closure, discontinuation, and transformation (Ketchum, 2020; Ketchum, 2022; Mattson, 2023). Physical queer spaces such as bars are on the decline, with US queer bar listings decreasing by almost 37% between 2007 and 2019, resulting in marked losses of half or more of lesbian bars, cruisy men's bars, and bars serving BIPOC queer people (Mattson, 2019, 2022). In parallel fashion, online queer spaces hosted on corporate platforms like America Online shut down as companies closed (Dame-Griff, 2023) or because of regulations disproportionately harming queer people. For instance, the US Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA)/Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) regulations stymied many trans BIPOC, especially from engaging in conversations about sex education and sex work (Fuentes et al., 2025).

A significant factor contributing to these losses is advancing gentrification, which decentres queer people and spaces by pushing them outside of urban, trendy areas (Doan & Higgins, 2011; Gieseeking, 2016). Gentrification uplifts specific queer spaces deemed *'respectable'*, rendering less commercialised spaces *'physically and economically marginal to and distant from the scene'* (Taylor,

2008, p. 532). Historical and contemporary divisions of queerness at the intersections of class, race, and gender, among other categories, also shape who can authentically embody specific queer identities in spaces (Forstie, 2020; Taylor, 2008). These divisions result in exclusions of working-class queers through classed expectations, including cover fees and drink prices (Binnie, 2018; Ketchum, 2021; Taylor, 2008); BIPOC due to a history of structural racism within queer spaces (Held, 2009; Hunter & Winder, 2019; Lane, 2016); and exclusion of femme and trans people due to patriarchal and homonormative structures (Binnie & Valentine, 1999; Castells, 1983; Hartless, 2018; Valentine, 2013). Such exclusion can also lead to greater effort on the part of these people to locate queer spaces and relevant information sources, such as increased travel time (Gibson & Kaplan, 2017).

Gentrification also operates in online spaces vis-à-vis algorithmic exclusion, commercialisation and commodification, and platform fragmentation, among other factors. Algorithmic exclusion can both affirm and marginalise queer identities, such as location-based dating app Grindr facilitating connections among certain users while excluding others due to vitriolic dating norms (e.g., ‘no fats, no femmes, no Asians’) and being in rural, remote locales (Aunspach, 2020; Conte, 2017). Surveillance capitalism turns queer people into consumers in online spaces. Platforms like Grindr profit from users’ data (and their networks’) to decide which ads to show them and to shape their behaviour, making them more predictable and easier to influence with those ads (Aunspach, 2020; Zuboff, 2019). Finally, platform fragmentation can cause digital gentrification by driving certain queer users off a platform. An example is Facebook’s ‘*real names*’ policy, which restricted the expression of drag and Indigenous names, potentially causing these groups to leave the platform (Haimson & Hoffmann, 2016). Such digital redlining enforces class and racial boundaries through technological policies, practices, investment, and pedagogy (Gilliard, 2017).

A final critical factor is the chronic threat of and experiences with violence, including shootings occurring in queer bars, spaces located in areas that police queer BIPOC people (Hanhardt, 2020; Reynolds, 2009), and online hate, harassment, and abuse (Hubbard & Keighley, 2023). According to the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD’s) 2025 ALERT Desk report, 2.5 anti-LGBTQ+ recorded incidents occurred per day, with over half targeting transgender and gender non-conforming people (GLAAD, 2025a). The report also notes a sharp rise in anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and online disinformation and malinformation, including doxxing and coordinated harassment campaigns. Finally, according to GLAAD’s 2025 Accelerating Acceptance Report, 84% of Gen Z LGBTQ+ adults believe violence or threats will increase in the coming year (GLAAD, 2025b). The spectre of this violence can deter queer people from locating support, including within queer spaces, ultimately contributing to a lack of social safety (Diamond & Alley, 2022).

Our work extends examinations of queerness, loss, and space into the information practices area by expanding spatial understandings of context (Chatman, 1991, 1999; Fisher & Naumer, 2006; Pettigrew, 1999; Savolainen, 2008). We pay particular attention here to Lloyd’s (2007) fractured information landscapes, which describe not only abrupt informational disruption but also the ongoing labour required to reconcile prior ways of knowing with environments marked by instability, exclusion, or loss. Thus, we seek to understand how marginalised communities archive their histories, including barriers and facilitators to these practices. In response to these objectives, our study asks the following questions: 1) What are the informational functions of queer spaces? and 2) How do queer people sustain queer spaces and uphold the legacies of those lost?

Materials and methods

Our institutional ethics boards approved this research at the University of Illinois [IRB Number: IRB23-0317] and the University of South Carolina [IRB Number: Pro00133762] for exempt review. We recruited 15 US queer adults using convenience and snowball sampling. We shared a digital recruitment flier that linked to a pre-screening survey with people in our networks and asked them to forward it to others who might qualify. Participants were selected based on the following

criteria: they could name a queer space to which they had lost access, were 18 or older, and had identities within the queer umbrella.

We conducted virtual Zoom interviews averaging 53 minutes (range 42–82 minutes). We provided participants with letters of invitation describing the study and obtained verbal assent before data collection. Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol organised around the following topics: participant background; ways the space served as an information hub; experience with losing the space; information practices in response to loss; and a debrief. Data collection and analysis were iterative, and we used theoretical sampling as the study continued to ensure we purposefully incorporated new perspectives. We concluded recruitment after we reached conceptual saturation; in other words, when we heard similar responses to our interview questions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We gave participants a \$30 digital gift card for their participation.

We audio-recorded the interviews and used Otter.ai to generate an initial transcript. Otter.ai transcription services follow best practices for data security and privacy laws, including the General Data Protection Regulation, the California Consumer Privacy Act, and the Voluntary Product Accessibility Template for accessibility requirements compliance (Herdiyanti, 2024). We disclosed to participants that we were using Otter.ai to generate an initial transcription and obtained their consent. We then double-checked the transcripts, redacting any identifying information, and sent them to participants for member checking. We registered both our Zoom and Otter.ai subscriptions under our institutional addresses, and we used local files downloaded to our machines rather than those uploaded to the cloud. Due to privacy concerns about Otter's 'Pilot Feature', we uploaded Zoom audio to Otter.ai for transcription rather than using the Zoom integration (Allyn, 2025).

We then analysed transcripts using a six-step thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) that included becoming familiar with the data, redacting identifying information, creating and refining initial codes using an abductive approach that combined deductive and inductive coding (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), writing analytic memos, and finalising a detailed codebook. Through abductive coding, three interrelated categories—embodied information encounters, localised information, and acts of information activism—emerged as central to participants' descriptions of queer information spaces and loss.

Figure 1 shows a word cloud of labels participants used to describe their sexualities and gender identities. We also asked participants to provide information about their race/ethnicity. Twelve participants identified as White, one participant identified as Afro-Indigenous Latine, one as Asian/Mixed Race, and one as Hispanic/Latino. We did not ask for any additional identifying information; however, four participants disclosed that they were in their 40s, four in their 30s, one in their 20s, and one who had just turned 18. Regions and locations discussed included the Midwest, the South, the West Coast, New England, and the Northeast (US), as well as Central America, Europe, and the UK. Participants also disclosed other significant identity intersections, such as having various types of disability, being sober, and being multiple types of students or academics.



Figure 1. Word cloud of participant gender and sexuality identity labels.

We approach this study as two queer White academics in our 30s with expertise in information practices and archives. We have both experienced losses of queer space due to community-based (first author) and institutional (second author) exclusion, as well as moves between rural and suburban conservative areas and urban progressive ones. We found that the participants we recruited and who agreed to interviews often reflected, rather than differed from, our own identities. Consequently, our study underrepresents individuals with different intersectional identities, non-white-collar occupations, and queer subcultures. Future research could focus more deliberately on these groups to better understand the sociocultural dynamics that influence access to, and the eventual loss of, queer information spaces and resources.

Additionally, while our study addressed information loss across various physical and digital spaces and resources, the emphasis on ‘information’ rather than ‘community’ or ‘culture’ may have discouraged some from participating, especially those who had lost access to queer spaces like bars and community centres. Several participants questioned whether spaces such as queer bars or restaurants qualified as information spaces. Though we reassured them that they did, the recruitment language and potential academic jargon in the field of information science likely deterred participation. Future studies could adopt a broader recruitment approach, focusing on the loss of space and resources, and introduce the concept of information during interviews rather than beforehand.

Results

Findings identified three interrelated categories central to understanding queer information spaces: 1) embodied information encounters, 2) localised information, and 3) acts of information activism to sustain spaces over time. We illustrate each theme with lightly edited quotes from participants. All participant names are pseudonyms. When we first introduce participants, we refer to them by their self-selected labels for sexual orientation, gender identity, and race/ethnicity. This information is essential, as it describes how their intersectional orientations toward space shape the meanings they assign to that space (Cox & Fulton, 2021) and how that space may shape their information source preferences and access (Gibson & Kaplan, 2017).

Embodied information encounters

Queer spaces played a critical role in supporting people's embodied information encountering and assessment. Per Ahmed (2006), queer is not solely an identity but also a subject position that represents a reorientation away from cis-heteronormative social structures and information, and towards other ways of inhabiting the world. This reorientation also occurs informationally, as queer people turn away from normative ways of engaging with information, such as what sources are authoritative, like doctors, parents, and teachers (Floegel & Costello, 2019). A related concept in the information science literature is Lloyd's (2017) fractured information landscapes, which signify a disruption between one's previously familiar environment and an unknown one, in which one is supposed to establish a new knowledge base, within the context of forced migration (see also Montague, 2025). In these instances, queer people must 'reconcile established ways of knowing', in this case from normative society, with new ways of knowing drawn from lived experiences, which provide them with new forms of information. Celia (cisgender lesbian/queer White woman), who resided in a rural conservative county in the US Southeast, addressed how she encountered new information about her queerness and to whom she was attracted by visiting a queer bar when she was 18:

My biggest influence growing up ... was my pastor's wife. She would always talk about what it was like ... to serve through her marriage, and she would serve her husband, and I never could get with that. It never felt right. I didn't learn anything about myself in that timeframe. The first night that I went to the gay bar, I was like, holy crap. This is what attraction feels like. I can't stop looking at that girl because she looks like Eminem. What is this all about? I learned a whole lot about myself. People naturally learn about themselves by exposure to things that cause a response.

Celia describes inhabiting a cis-heteronormative and patriarchal social system in which her key information source growing up is her pastor's wife. However, Celia relied on her body, specifically her emotional response to the information she was learning, to assess it as irrelevant to her identity. When she finally visited a queer bar, she had her first embodied encounter with information relevant to learning about herself: people who 'cause[d] a response' within her of attraction.

Queer spaces facilitated participants' exposure to new ways of existing within the world, which they both experienced in their own bodies and witnessed in others. Brian (nonbinary, pansexual/queer white person) recounted how a do-it-yourself music and social space run by an informal collective of socialist punks in a US Northeastern town, the majority of whom were queer, facilitated 'the first time I ever watched someone inject testosterone'. They also were exposed to 'people openly practicing polyamorous relationships' and 'just existing openly and without fear'. These embodied moments laid the groundwork for more situated, place-based forms of information exchange, which participants described as essential to sustaining queer connection. Being in spaces that facilitated encounters with different forms of embodiment illustrates the indispensable role of localised information within queer information spaces.

Localised information

Participants emphasised the importance of localised information, which comprises knowledge and resources geographically, culturally, and relationally situated within queer communities. One argument made in the face of the closure of local queer spaces has been post-gay assimilationist narratives that, due to a growing cultural acceptance of queer people, they do not require spaces of their own, which Gieseke (2020, p. 24) recognises as a privilege of 'the white and wealthy who can choose to assimilate as such'. Informationally, such a narrative might argue that queer people's needs are being met on a national scale, whether by dating apps, social media spaces, and national information resources.

However, participants like Izzy (pansexual White cis-woman) emphasised the importance of local queer spaces in addressing the scarcity of information and resources that often results from their absence. Specifically, Izzy discussed her efforts with other queer psychology graduate students to create a space promoting the exchange of information for their specific needs in response to losing another local queer space:

There are unique issues for queer psych graduate students in terms of finding therapy care where they don't know the person professionally and [who] is also culturally competent and can work with a queer individual ... And through this loss of physical space ... our reaction was so desperate to cling to one another to create this community.

There is a need for Izzy and her community of queer psychology graduate students to access local therapy care for several reasons. First, if they wish to see a therapist in person, they must be able to travel. Even if they were flexible to meet a therapist online, the provider would still need to be local to have the visit covered by student health insurance. Furthermore, Izzy and her community are familiar with many therapists through coursework that often includes field placements and internships. These characteristics combine to produce a need unique to Izzy and her community. As a result, Izzy has created a new community space where she and her fellow graduate students can circulate information related to their local problems, such as where to find a culturally competent, queer-friendly therapist who is (presumably) in-network and does not know them professionally.

This new space, created by Izzy and her community, promotes circulation, which encompasses actions that facilitate participants' 'access to information related to diverse LGBTQ experiences' (Hardy, 2021, p. 105). Gray (2009) originally described circulation practices as introducing queer people to queer spaces, specifically boundary publics, as spaces created by queer people in response to the absence of more stable queer spaces, such as community centres, coffee shops, or bars. Such publics are temporary and occur both at the margins and within the public sphere. Examples of boundary publics include digital spaces, such as Trans Tumblr, and in-person pop-up queer events. Due to their impermanence and strategic visibility, boundary publics rely on circulation as a critical practice among queer people who communicate about these spaces. Hyacinth (queer transsexual White person) discussed visiting a warehouse space where he met 'somebody who is going to be opening a [queer] bookstore in the area'. They expressed excitement in having a space to access queer books since:

I can't access the YA fiction or a good majority of the books [in my public library] because there is no lift to that second floor. And while I'm technically able to, it isn't often, and frequently not safe or incredibly painful for me to go up a flight of stairs.

Here, circulation occurred when Hyacinth engaged in a serendipitous conversation with someone opening a queer bookstore, which gave them an alternative space to access queer books. Further, this encounter underscored how access to queer information was not only bodily but also infrastructural, dependent on local accessibility and the physical design of community institutions. Greg (cisgender White gay man) described how public libraries could facilitate queer circulation by highlighting 'local smaller library branches' that feature 'on racks inside the door' a queer circular documenting local queer culture.

Adrien (non-binary queer White person) illustrates how circulation depends on local embeddedness across digital networks. They described their move from 'lesbianville, USA' where they had a relatively 'untraumatic upbringing', to an area where 'I have no idea where to get information'. When Adrien moved, they experienced a sense of disorientation (Ahmed, 2006) because the digital resource they relied on for circulation in their prior home, Queer Exchange, was not present in their new location. Queer Exchanges are online private Facebook groups for

queer people who reside mainly in urban and progressive areas to share and exchange information, such as *'to find dog walkers, house sitters, barbers, just everything'*, as well as to locate community, connect with jobs and mutual aid initiatives, and more. This example further underscores the critical connections between physical and digital spaces, as Queer Exchange's function is circulation and, therefore, it depends on geography. Adrien addressed the importance of their social networks in facilitating circulation: *'Finding resources in [US STATE] has been hard. I mostly use word of mouth once I started to make more friends here'*. Adrien's observation highlights a challenge in circulation: participation requires being networked or having awareness of the spaces that facilitate network access (Hardy, 2021). Or, as Adrien puts it, *'you have to have some access to information to get more information'*. This account also illustrates Montague's (2025) concept of dynamic information layers, which are closely tied to place and must be relearned or rebuilt after movement. These layers are opposed to the foundational layer, which represents information resources that travel with an individual across places and remain usable despite geographic change, such as Adrien's lived experiences as a queer person.

While Adrien's narrative highlighted the challenges of re-establishing networks after relocation, others focused on the erosion of existing local ties. During their interview, DJ (queer/non-binary pansexual/bisexual White person) also spoke about the importance of local space: *'One of the challenges we're running into as a society is that we've become so international and global that we're losing touch with the people in our community. And I think that hurts for personal support and personal bonds'*. This personal support and bonds foster circulation. As stated above, depending on one's location, identifying queer spaces and resources can be challenging, as such identification often depends on circulation and networks, which may be more limited in certain areas. As DJ elaborated:

It's one thing where everybody is accepting and affirming, for the most part. I know, you can step out the door in, say, San Francisco, and go somewhere and not worry about it. But here, we have to make sure that we know about these spaces, and I think there needs to be more communication. And I wish there were more resources for that.

However, Greg, who resides in a progressive urban area, provides a counterexample to the idea that even places that are *'accepting and affirming'* require local queer spaces. Greg discussed his experiences with several queer bars, which, while some are still standing, he can no longer inhabit. The first bar was a regular haunt for Greg. *'There's still a cruisiness about it, where it's like, the single people space'*, he described. Now that Greg is in a monogamous marriage, he does not necessarily feel like the space is for him anymore: *'If I go in with my husband, I'll have people that will hit on me. I'm like, "Oh, this is my husband", and there's almost a "Well, what are you doing here then?"'* Another bar used to be a space for queer people to watch drag performances and learn about *'contributions made by drag performers in drag culture'*. However, over time, the neighbourhood composition surrounding this bar started to shift from a historical gaybourhood, in which queer bars were *'part of the tapestry'*, to gentrified spaces with more straight couples. As a result, Greg said that he and his friends have been *'spaced out'* of the bar. Greg described a final bar closing due to gentrification and reopening as an inclusive, but not specifically queer, bar.

These queer spaces have historically served as critical nodes within a gaybourhood, facilitating the circulation of information about local queer culture. For a time, Greg hosted karaoke at the queer bar that closed, recounting conversations with *'younger men who would be exploring the scene and their sort of interaction with it, their place in it'*. These spaces also facilitated the circulation of information about queer events and spaces: *'There was information around town'*. For instance, Greg stated that it was *'known'* in the gaybourhood that on Wednesday nights at a coffee bar, *'there would be a huge LGBTQ meeting'*. However, as gentrification changed the composition of the neighbourhood, these bars either closed, opened to *'outsiders'*, or seemed to tighten around an

'LGBTQ bubble' with specific norms in place that keep certain queer people away. Ultimately, the importance of local queer spaces has increased for Greg, despite living in an affirming place. He noted, *'If you're looking for specifically LGBTQ places, those no longer exist. They are now, they're mainstream'*.

Information activism

Circulation is an essential activity within an umbrella of information-related activities and skills that queer people engage in, both within and outside queer spaces, to address information scarcity in a heteronormative society. McKinney (2020, p. 2) describes this larger umbrella of activities and skills as information activism, *'a range of materials and processes constituting the collective, often unspectacular labour that sustains social movements'*. Information activism *'brings together people, their visions of justice, and the media they use to organize, store, and provide access to information'*. This activism and justice encompass grassroots organising, but at its core, it includes any activity that makes life as a queer person possible. Information activism, therefore, represents a broader concept in which circulation plays a critical role, which also characterises queer spaces, including their creation, maintenance, and sustenance over time.

M (nonbinary ace White person) described their extensive effort to create and maintain digital queer spaces when discussing their declining use of Twitter/X to circulate information about *'disability LGBT experiences, especially trans and nonbinary ones'*. M's value as an information source gained them *'a large enough platform that I ended up on the front page of several social media sites a few times'*. Twitter's 'takeover' by Elon Musk rendered it an unsafe digital space for M and their followers. M had to contend with the loss of circulating information on this more widely known and visible platform. They had already established a more extensive network on a variety of *'distributed channels, which they used to recreate aspects of this space. As a result, there are [queer online] spaces, but nothing interconnected at this point'*. An advantage to this lack of interconnection is that *'not having everything in one place means that some random person like Elon Musk can't come in and just screw everything up immediately'*. However, one disadvantage is that it's *'hard to go from one [space] to the other'*, which leads to *'accidental redundancies'* of information. Specifically, *'the lack of communication between different projects ends up meaning that you do have a lot of people working in places that [are] trying to do something good, but it's something that's already been done'*. M's quote highlights a critical challenge in circulation within ephemeral queer spaces, such as boundary publics, which involves the sustainability and persistence of information.

M later described the extensive effort required to maintain a Discord server specifically for trans people in their local geographical area. This work included *'handling our backend server management'*, engaging in *'basic verification on someone before they get access'* to the Discord to ensure they are not there *'with any ill intent'*, *'keeping a list of [trans friendly] providers, advantages, disadvantages, strong competencies, weak areas in their care'*, and *'mak[ing] a channel for specific resources [and] pin[ning] resources'*. Therefore, queer spaces can perform only informational functions, such as facilitating embodied information encountering and circulation, if those inhabiting them engage in information activism over time to sustain the space.

Information activism also occurred when participants discussed their actions to preserve lost spaces. For instance, Greg stayed connected to people who used to frequent queer spaces he lost access to through social media: *'We still have that shared connection digitally through that physical space years ago'*. This account connects to participant Brian, who discussed reconnecting with people from a do-it-yourself punk space they used to inhabit via social media and suggests the blurring of on/offline in terms of spaces, and especially the potential for queer people to leverage on/offline networks to keep a space that has disappeared alive by fostering community connections and exchange of stories. Specifically, they are working on archiving an oral history of the do-it-yourself space on Instagram: *'I would archive it on Instagram, which is what I'm doing'*

right now'. In addition, Brian is documenting the stories of older queer people and serving as an information source in emergent queer spaces:

I've seen statistics that seven out of ten gay people died of AIDS. I go out now to shows. I used to feel uncomfortable because I was like, 'All these kids don't want me in their space'. But I've had people tell me they like seeing someone who's like them but older because they have no image of what they could be as older. I think by documenting, I'm providing validity for myself and for people whose stories we're sharing.

Brian's narrative illustrates how information activism is not limited to just codifying information, such as creating a pamphlet or resource, but extends to 'upholding a legacy' by fostering 'us-led spaces that aren't commercial. Because there's a need for community beyond what capitalism will ever provide for us'. Brian envisions the information activism inherent in fostering these spaces as a historical duty to communal care that queer people have. Therefore, information activism shows that information is not an end in and of itself but rather encompasses the work that goes into 'upholding a legacy' of queer activism by fostering queer-led spaces that connect people to queer community and culture. Conversations about fostering and preserving queer space must maintain the physical aspects of the space and the information that circulated within it, support the work that occurred there, and understand how this work connects to the local community, history, and larger queer culture and politics.

Discussion and conclusion

As evidenced by the findings, which spanned embodied encounters, localised information, and acts of information activism, queer spaces serve as pivotal nodes within an information network, disseminating various forms of queer information and knowledge. These spaces are essential because queer people often lack access to information in traditional venues, such as schools, homes, and libraries. Findings support scholarship on queer identity-making, suggesting that community spaces offer affirming and inclusive information, which is often lacking in hegemonic locales (Floegel & Costello, 2019; Kitzie et al., 2019). In response to these realities, practitioners and scholars must reorient informational outreach and provision to prioritise and affirm queer knowledge, as well as the spaces where queer people can learn about themselves, their histories, and their communities (Delmonaco et al., 2023; Hawkins et al., 2017; Vera et al., 2020).

Taken together, these three categories suggest that libraries and archives can use this work to develop more inclusive and supportive environments for queer individuals—spaces that, as the MUNA lyrics that open this paper suggest, provide connection and safety even when queer spaces are under threat. Several participants noted that increased access to digital information enabled them to acquire general knowledge more efficiently. Absent in this shift were more localised and identity-specific resources. We argue for a bespoke approach to information provision within these spaces, designed from the ground up rather than from the top down. As Kitzie (2019) observed, a top-down approach proves irrelevant to most queer users of libraries and information hubs, rendering invisible localised information resources and support. In turn, a local information institution might work with its queer communities to identify an information need or space that is currently lacking a presence elsewhere and create a hyper-focused resource. For instance, libraries could create dedicated queer resource sections that include books, zines, and digital archives of local queer history. They could also host regular events, such as queer book clubs, film screenings, and workshops on queer history and activism. Archives could partner with local queer organisations to document and preserve the histories of queer spaces and communities, ensuring these stories are accessible to future generations. Beyond preservation, archives can act as active partners in information activism by equipping communities to document and disseminate their own stories. Ideas such as guided tours of former queer neighbourhoods and community centres,

community-curated collections like flier archives from do-it-yourself spaces, and oral history projects can give queer people autonomy over how their narratives are recorded and shared.

Another layer of queer information spaces and their loss concerns how information circulates within them. While traditional conceptualisations of library and information provision imagine the librarian's role as an information curator and distributor, in many queer spaces, information circulates throughout the entire communal space rather than through a central point of reference. Within queer information spaces, there rarely exists a reference or circulation desk. Instead, many of the space's members share in the communal and affective distribution of knowledge. One of the most significant ways a library can support the growth and thriving of queer information spaces, particularly during times of loss, is by allowing its space to facilitate, even if informally, such knowledge distribution. For example, does a public library have a community bulletin board? If so, what types of vetting process does the bulletin board have, and how might such vetting practices result in curatorial practices that support or negate the needs of queer individuals? As our findings suggest, queer communities will circulate information within spaces regardless of visible support for such circulation. So, what might it mean to invite these individuals into a more communal, visible act in which librarians and their spaces offer assistance and sustainability to such work rather than directing the flow of that information unilaterally?

Extending these implications beyond libraries and archives, community organisations can likewise draw on these findings to create and sustain queer spaces that address the unique needs of their members. A community space focused on queer communal connection might aid participants like L (Afro-Indigenous Latine queer/non-binary person), who left their queer college student group after realising that many members were unwilling to acknowledge their white privilege and its impact on the group's inclusivity. As a person who was not old enough to drink, L could not access community information spaces in a queer bar, and the provision of such a space within a community centre, even if only for informal discussion, might provide a considerable informational boon to L following their loss of space.

Finally, policymakers can use these insights to advocate for the protection and funding of queer spaces, recognising their importance for the well-being and identity formation of queer individuals. For instance, local governments could provide grants to support the establishment and maintenance of queer community centres and safe spaces. They could implement policies to protect these spaces from gentrification and ensure they remain accessible to the community. Robust policy must move beyond protection of queer spaces to actively resource the information activism that sustains them through grants, legal safeguards, and institutional recognition of community archiving as vital civic labour. Ultimately, queer spaces, whether physical, digital, or imagined, function as critical infrastructures of information and care. Even when such spaces disappear, the embodied, localised, and activist practices of circulation, archiving, and mutual support they foster endure. In this way, the 'place' MUNA evokes is both metaphor and method: a collective imagining that sustains queer freedom through information, memory, and connection. Protecting these informational spaces and the people who build them is, therefore, not only an archival act but also a declaration of continued queer existence.

Acknowledgements

We want to thank the anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful feedback and our participants for their shared desire to build better worlds.

About the authors

Vanessa Kitzie is an associate professor at the University of South Carolina, School of Information Science, PhD, Rutgers University. Her research interests address what Bates calls the social question within the invisible substrate of information science, focusing on queer communities, often in health and healthcare contexts. Her email is kitzie@mailbox.sc.edu.

Travis L. Wagner is an assistant professor at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, School of Information Science, PhD, University of South Carolina. Their research explores the sociotechnical challenges of preserving and curating queer information and culture with an emphasis on community-centric and amateur practices that help facilitate this work. Their email is wagnert@illinois.edu.

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