Information behaviour of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals (LGBT)

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Those teenagers in the process of recognition of their sexual identity within the LGBT collective (lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transexuals) should be able to access the most accurate and quality information available in order to experience that transitional stage in the healthiest and safest manner. The objective of this research was to know the experiences which gave place to the information behaviour of the people included in this LGBT collective, seeking to satisfy their anxieties as they grew older and matured. A qualitative explorative study was designed and interviews were conducted to a group of people selected according to a non-probabilistic sampling of convenience. The population of interest was anyone between 18 to 30 years old included in the collective. The information obtained was analysed through a qualitative analysis of content. The data obtained make reference to two aspects: personal situation and development and the mechanisms used by informers for seeking information.

Introduction

The studies on information behaviour aim to know why people need, seek and use information, both in their working environment and in their daily life (Fisher, Erdelez, &McKechnie, 2005). The study of these aspects in populations whose life situations may be classified as transitional is of a special relevance since the information systems planned may serve as support for individuals in that situation. An example of this kind of situations is the one experienced by teenagers in the process of recognition of their sexuality, and concretely, those people included within the LGBT collective (lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals). If the access to information is crucial for citizens in any democratic society, in the case of the LGBT collective, Keilty (2009) points out, in addition, that this access is essential even for their survival, since it can contribute to the prevention of suicides or HIV infections.

Given that public information services should be designed for the entire population and should respond to the demands for information of any citizen, some researches have been geared towards knowing what is being done in meeting the growing demands for information by the LGBT population. This is the case of Curry's works (2005), in where the reference librarian's behaviour in the public library was valued in view to the demands for information by young gays and lesbians, or the study led by Schaller (2011), which gathered opinions of groups of LGBT university students about the gaps and barriers they encountered when accessing the information in the university environment.

In this context, this research was aimed at knowing the experiences that gave place to the information behaviour of those people included in the LGBT collective who sought to satisfy their anxieties as they grew up and matured, in the process of recognition of their sexual identity.

Methods

In order to develop the objectives proposed, an exploratory study with a qualitative methodological approach was designed with the aim of gaining knowledge about the study under consideration.

The population of interest was anyone between 18 to 30 years old included in the LGBT collective. In addition, given that the research sought to understand the process of information seeking (rather than representative finding) a non-probability sampling of convenience, of a maximum variation was considered appropriate (Patton, 2002). The final sample was composed of a person from each one of the LGBT orientations (Table 1).

Informant	Age	Sexual definition	Studies	Context

number				
Informant number 1	23	Bisexual	Upper Secondary Education	Rural
Informant number 2	24	Lesbian	Master's Degree Studies	Urban
Informant number 3	22	Gay	Undergraduate Studies	Urban
Informant number 4	28	Lesbian	*Licenciatura* Studies (former Spanish undergraduate degree)	Rural
Informant number 5	25	Transsexual/Heterosexual	*Licenciatura* Studies (former Spanish undergraduate degree)	Urban

Table1. Informants' characteristics

A semi-structured interview was employed as information collection techniques. Information was collected from a previous script on information behaviour of LGBT in general, their information needs, and the way to obtain such information. Once the informants agreed to carry out the interview, we proceeded to the explanation and the signing of the informed consent.

The interviews were recorded in audio, and besides, field notes were taken, from both the behaviour analysis and the remarks made by the informants themselves, apart from the information provided in such interview. The interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes and were conducted during the months of February, March and April 2014.

In view of the sensitivity of the subject under consideration and the fear of rejection, the carrying out of these interviews was not easy. Some people with whom contact was established rejected to participate in the study, some other accepted, but once the interview was started they refused to continue with it. Finally, some people who eventually participated in the study experienced certain discomfort with the fact of recording their answers in certain questions.

Once the interviews were conducted, the recordings were listened to and the responses were transcribed. These transcriptions, along with the field notes, were analysed through a qualitative analysis of content (González Teruel y Barrios Cerrejón, 2012). Out from this analysis, a series of categories which represented the description of the situation were obtained, which gave place to an information-seeking behaviour and the tools that provide the information needed. In order to guarantee the speed and credibility of the research, the outcomes obtained and analysed were contrasted and discussed by a researcher external to the process.

Results

The results are expounded according to the categories resulting from the analysis of qualitative content (table 2). Initially, these categories emerged from the scripts used in the interview. Nevertheless, as data gathering and analysis progressed, new categories based on these data were generated.

a) PERSONAL AND INFORMATIVE SITUATION AND DEVELLOPENT

Age and initial development
Birthplace and growing up
Familiar environment
b) EMPLOYED MECHANISMS/TOOLS
Social relationships
Formal institutions (medical units, libraries, collectives, professionals, etc.)
Digital tools

Table 2. Categories resulting from the content analysis of the interviews

a) <u>Personal and informative situation and development</u>

This first category describes the circumstances of the beginning of the sexuality acceptance and how it influences over their information behaviour. This process of sexuality acceptance occurs mainly at an early stage or during adolescence.

It happened when I was 15. Well, around 14 or 15. Well, I think I've always known what I was, but I didn't accept it (...) I think I found the support I needed to face reality when all those TV series which talked about it began to be broadcasted, and in all those people who had already come out (...) I was really scared, I tried to hide it (...) I didn't talk to anyone [Informant 2].

The place where people lived was a feature that conditioned the sexuality acceptance process. Despite the availability of information via Internet, social relationships were not that open in rural areas:

I didn't know any girl who liked girls (...) I searched for films in the video shop,but I had to illegally download them from the Internet. So if I could not find them in a video shop let alone would I find them in my village's library...

The family reaction had an influence over their development, since in some cases, families led them to regard homosexuality as something negative or confusing and in other cases it normalised completely.

It caused fear, but never rejection; (...) I will give you the example of my father, mother and brother. They only knew about transsexuals through TV or from prostitution, or by social stigmas associated with it. [Informant 5].

Finally, the views of friends on sexual diversity had an influence on the informants' behaviour in their "coming out of the closet" process.

The models which led me to accept myself were those TV series which tackled homosexuality and friends who were homosexuals (...) they got really hooked on "Queer as Folk" a series which was about gays (...) everybody loved that series (...). It depends much on the person, it depends on if you hear them commenting or stuff like that [Informant 2].

b) <u>Mechanisms/tools employed to obtain information</u>

This category describes the strategies used by the people interviewed to obtain information. The first of these strategies is the relation with those acquaintances who are known to have experienced a similar process to theirs: *My friends told me about lesbian pubs and they took me to the pub "Mona Lisa", "ADN" [when she arrived in Valencia] (...)*[Informant 4]

On the other hand, another strategy considered at the beginning was to resort to institutions which provided help to people living this kind of situations (LGBT collectives, psychologists, specialised medical units, etc.):

The good thing about a collective is, that if you turn to one of them, you will find people like you (...) you will ask for help to people like you (...) sometimes the collective doesn't know, but people do (...) I turned to them because a friend suggested it to me [Informant 5].

Finally, while the consult to the library stock did not turn out to be as an actual information search strategy in any interview, the same cannot be said for information-seeking via Internet. In general, digital tools are widely employed, both to obtain information and to look for friends or sexual partners.

There was a section in the forum to ask about any issue wanted to be exhibited, anyone overstepped the mark (...) Tumblr is a microblogging network which is based on the reblogging of news regularly, and these reblogging are not about opinions made by anyone, as Twitter (...) Twitter is not very reliable (...) [Informer 4].

Conclusion

In the first place, taking a qualitative approach in this work enabled us to obtain an in-depth knowledge of aspects that statistics on LGBT populations does not enable us to know, since it describes the situation superficially. The results presented in this document are a first exploration prior to future works which delve deeper into the most relevant aspects that emerged from the research.

As described above, the identification and acceptance process occurred at early ages. Moreover, in the process of sexual identity acceptance, informants resorted to a person from who they knew they could obtain information. It involves the mentor's figure who, according to Yeh (2008), are people that become into social agents who facilitate the informants' integration. Informants make a big effort to understand something which does not fit well in a society dominated by heterosexism. Along with the figure of the mentor, it is important to highlight the importance of electronic information.

It involves a fundamental tool in the seeking and the dissemination of information of the LGBT collective, as Martel (2013) asserts. Information is better used, but the quality of information available via this means of communication is not always the appropriate. In this sense, with the aim of filtering inadequate information, information literacy of Internet users is important, concretely of the collective of LGBT teenagers.

In this way, the importance of the mentor's figure, along with the great use of social media as strategies for the information gathering, are two aspects that should be taken into account from the viewpoint of the information services planning geared towards the LGBT teenagers.

In general, our society is considered "out of the closet" but the information LGBT is not visualised properly, due to prejudices or ignorance. It is necessary to carry out further researches in order to optimise resources and to make public information services also consider providing quality services for those citizens generically included in the LGBT collective.

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