Supplementary materials for the talk
"Public sphere institutions or safe spaces — can libraries be both?"
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Contents:

Brief summary of the study

This study was caried out in the spring of 2021 as part of a bachelor's thesis project in library and information science at Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet). The study involved three parallel online surveys — one for LGBTQIA+ respondents, one for cisgender heterosexual respondents, and one for library employees — as well as seven interviews with queer librarians.

The link to the surveys was shared on social media, with repeated encouragement for respondents to share the link widely in their own communities. Responses were collected between February 16th and March 21st. The surveys received a total of 1,070 responses, with 642 of those from queer/LGBTQIA+ individuals.

The survey for LGBTQIA+ respondents was wide-ranging and covered respondents' library use; feelings of safety, inclusion, and belonging at the library; experiences of minority stress at the library; consumption of queer media; and level satisfaction with the library's collection, cataloguing, and shelving of queer materials, among other topics. Cisgender heterosexual respondents received a shorter version of the survey that was meant to provide a foundation for direct comparison on a subset of questions for which I could find no previous research done on a general population.

Results were analyzed using a variety of tools including Jupyter notebooks in JupyterLab, Python 3, pandas, Matplotlib, NumPy, and SciPy.stats.

Figures

These figures may be directly referenced (by number) during the panel discussion. Additional figures are available at the link in the additional resources section at the end of this document.

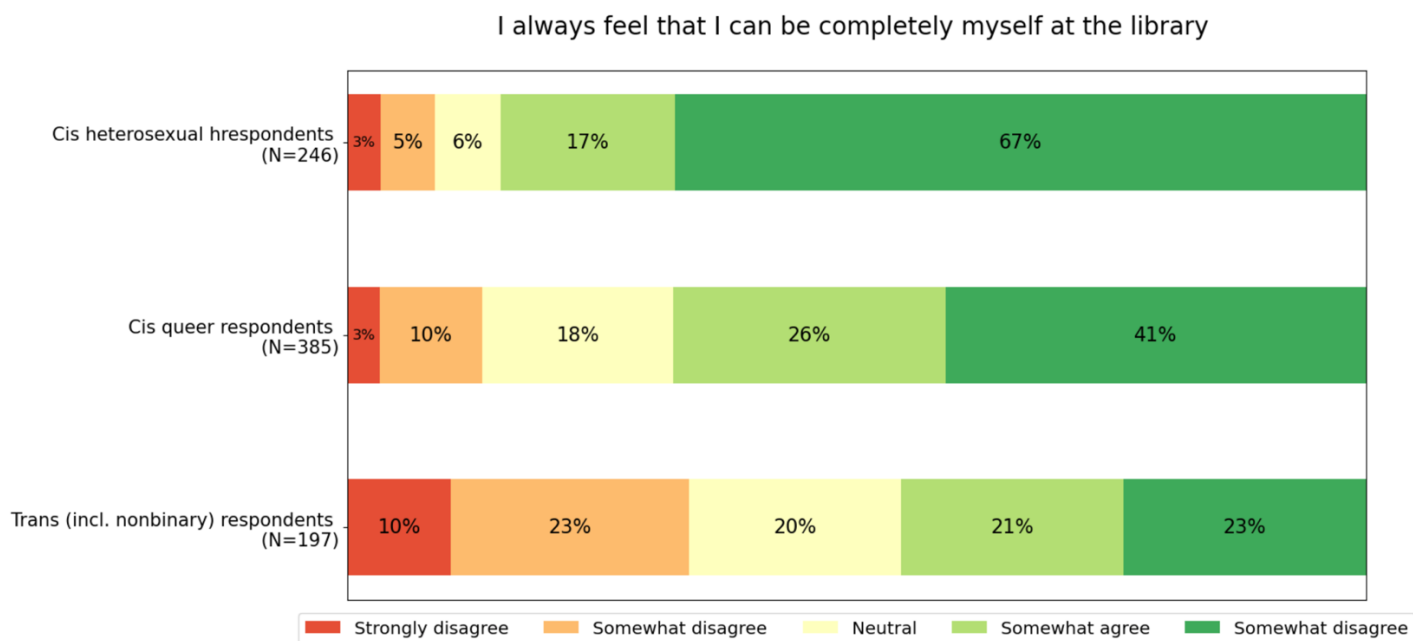**Fig. 1** shows participants' responses to the statement "I always feel that I can be completely myself at the library".

I always feel that I can be completely myself at the library

Fig. 2 shows percentages of the same three groups who strongly agreed with the same statement, organized by region.

Percentage of each group who **strongly agree** with the statement
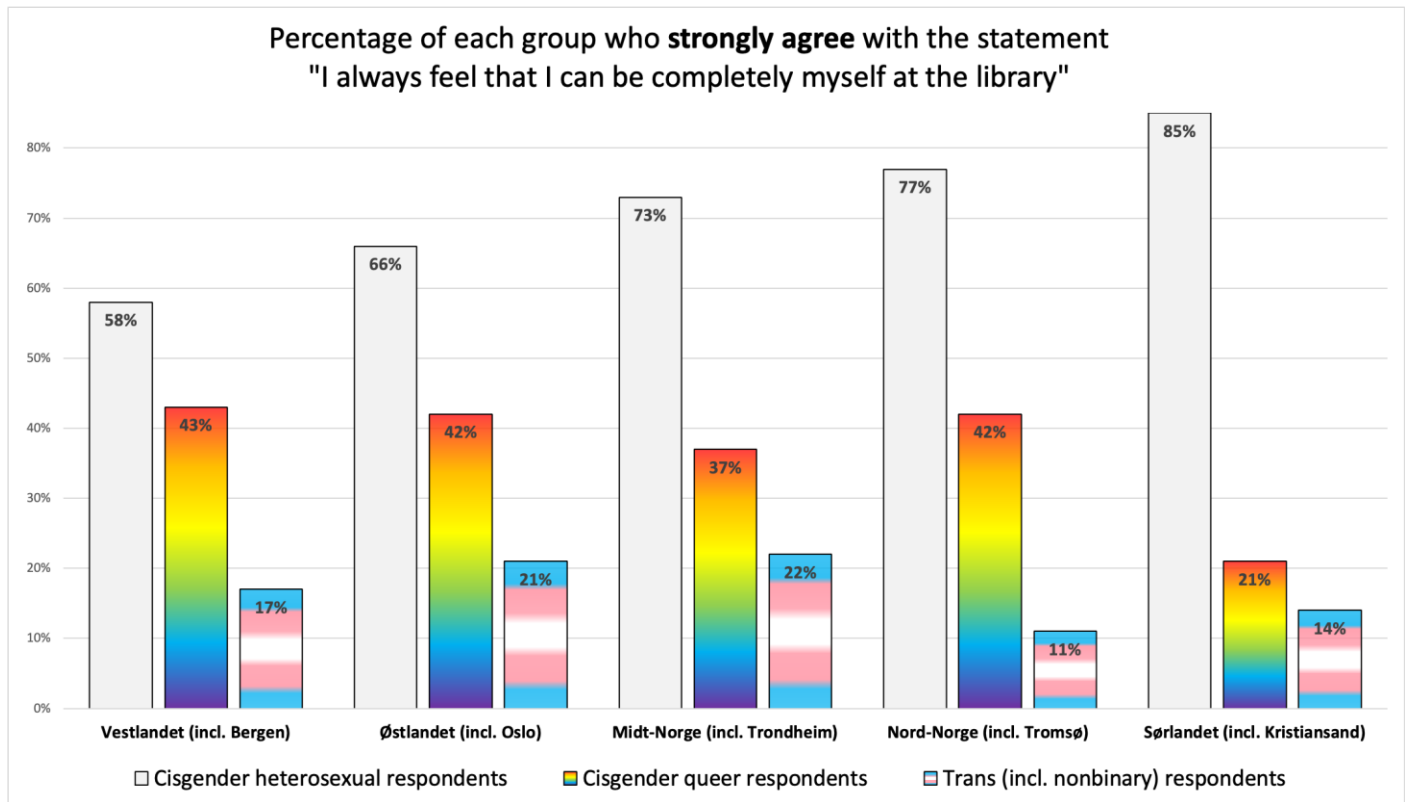"I always feel that I can be completely myself at the library"

Fig. 3 shows responses to the same statement further broken down by whether or not respondents had other axes of marginalization and sorted by the percentage who selected 'strongly agree', in descending order.

(Respondents were prompted with the following question, where phrases in square brackets were omitted from cisgender heterosexual respondents' version of the question: "[In addition to being queer/LGBTQIA+,] Do you have any [other] marginalized identities? For example, are you [also] neurodivergent, disabled, a person of color, or part of a religious or ethnic minority?")
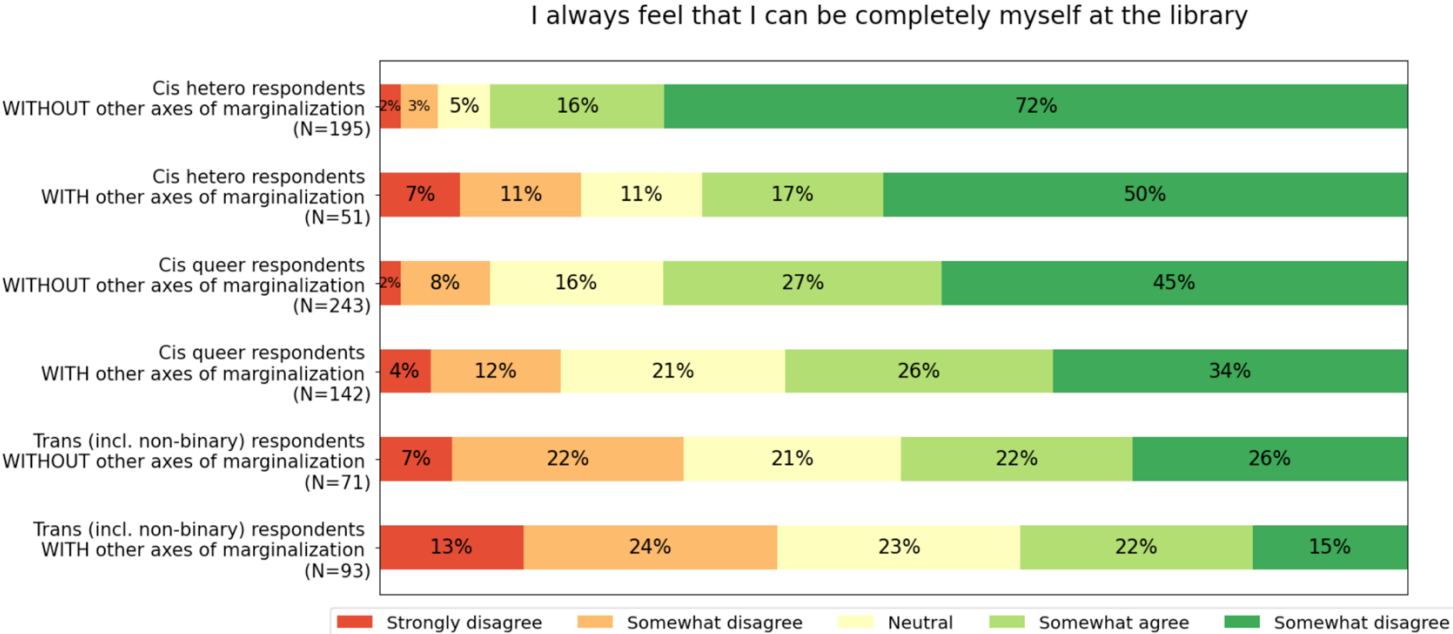

I always feel that I can be completely myself at the library

Fig. 4 shows percentages of queer and non-queer users who responded that they "never" feel unsafe or uncomfortable at the library.

Note that responses are not directly comparable as queer respondents' question included the additional phrase "for reasons related to my LGBTQIA+ identity" whereas cisgender, heterosexual respondents' question did not make any reference to identity. For more on this, and other questions of methodology, see this blog post (in Norwegian — Google translate does a decent job with it.)

Percentage who selected **'never'** in response to the statement "I feel unsafe or uncomfortable at the library [for reasons related to my LGBTQIA+ identity]"

- Oslo (Deichman system): LGBTQIA+ respondents 73%, Cisgender heterosexual respondents 70%
- Other urban areas: LGBTQIA+ respondents 67%, Cisgender heterosexual respondents 77%
- Rural areas: LGBTQIA+ respondents 63%, Cisgender heterosexual respondents 83%

■ LGBTQIA+ respondents (all) □ Cisgender heterosexual respondents
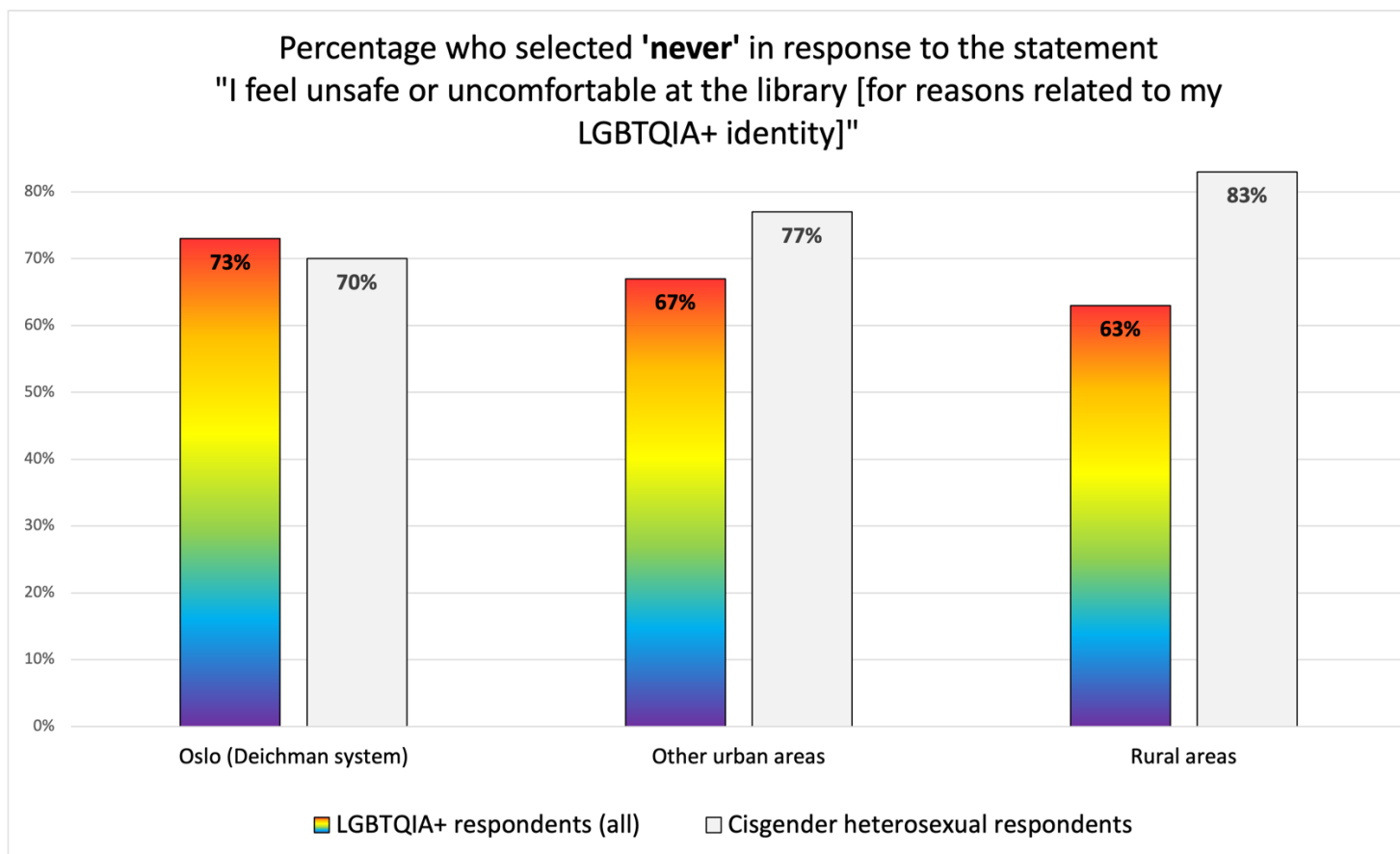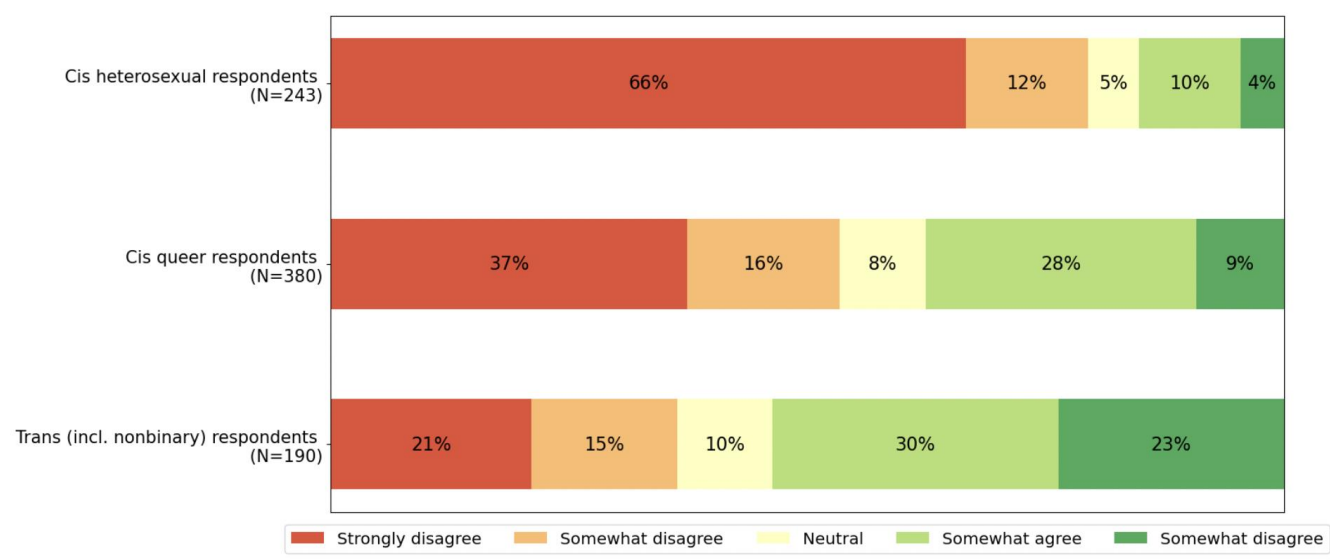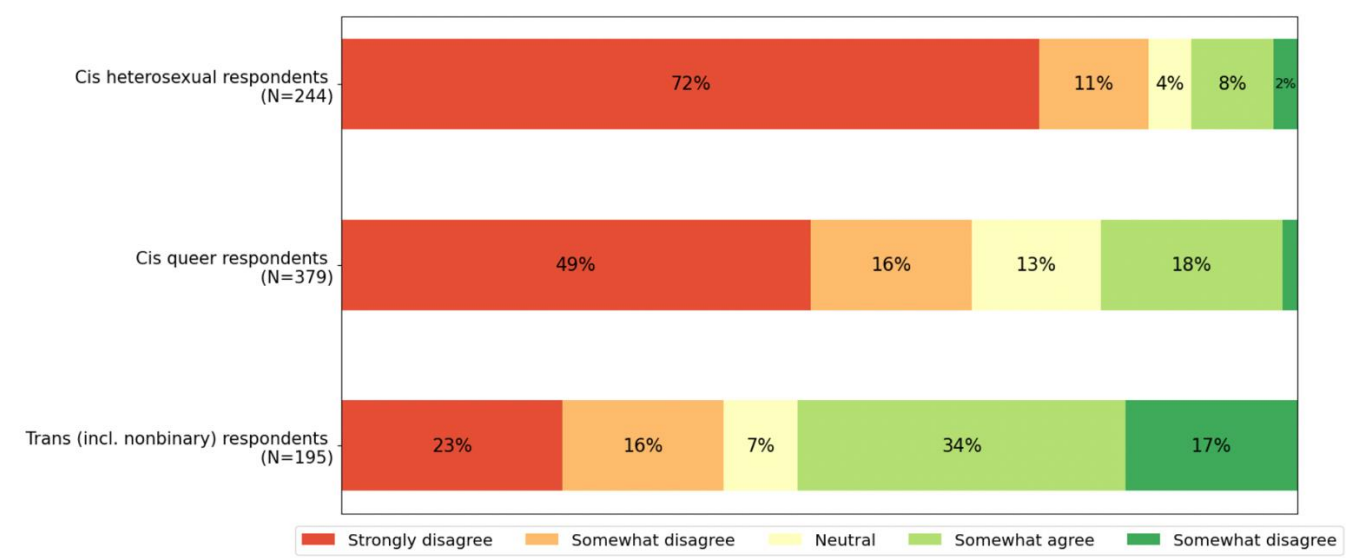
Fig. 5 shows responses to two questions that were meant to measure patrons' levels of minority stress at the library (see Meyer, 2003). In both cases, nearly all of the relatively small number of 'agree' responses from cisgender heterosexual respondents come from those who experience marginalization along other axes. Cisgender heterosexual respondents' version of the questions did not include phrases in square brackets.

Sometimes I wonder whether or worry that others are judging me when I look at [queer] media at the library

Respondent group	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree
Cis heterosexual respondents (N=243)	66%	12%	5%	10%	4%
Cis queer respondents (N=380)	37%	16%	8%	28%	9%
Trans (incl. nonbinary) respondents (N=190)	21%	15%	10%	30%	23%

Sometimes I wonder or worry about [how my queer/LGBTQIA+ identity will impact] how I will be treated by library employees

Respondent group	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree
Cis heterosexual respondents (N=244)	72%	11%	4%	8%	2%
Cis queer respondents (N=379)	49%	16%	13%	18%	
Trans (incl. nonbinary) respondents (N=195)	23%	16%	7%	34%	17%

Selected qualitative responses

In an open comment field at the end of the survey, a number of respondents directly referenced (in)visibility as being relevant for feelings of safety and/or belonging at the library, including the following examples, which are provided in both the original Norwegian and my own translation.

> "Jeg har det stort sett veldig fint på bibliotek men jeg legger ofte skeive uttrykk igjen hjemme."
> *Things are generally quite fine for me at the library, but I often leave expressions of my queer identity at home.*
>
> > – a cisgender queer woman, age 16-29

> "[Bibliotek] er som alle andre offentlige rom. Tryggest hvis du er usynlig".
> *The library is like all other public spaces. Safest if you are invisible.*
>
> > – a non-binary, transmasc library user, age 30-44

> "jeg er veldig fornøyd med biblioteket som det er, men det er finnes alltid et forbedringspotensial. [*sic]* Som cis og straight-passing er det heller ikke jeg som merker det først når skoen trykker."
> *I am very satisfied with the library as it is, but there is always room for improvement. As a cis and straight-passing person, I'm also not the first person to notice when the shoe pinches.*
>
> > – a cisgender gay man, age 16-29

Some responses also highlighted the complexity of this issue and the ways in which other forms of privilege and axes of marginalization can play into feelings of safety or inclusion:

> "[Biblioteket] har blitt samlingsplass for innvandrere. De har ofte et annet syn på både kvinner og skeive. Så jeg liker meg ikke der. Må skjule at jeg er skeiv."
> *The library has become a gathering place for immigrants. They often have a different view of both women and queer people. So I am not comfortable there. I have to hide that I am queer.*
>
> > – a cisgender lesbian woman, age 30-44

As a counterpoint, respondents who are both queer *and* immigrants — as well as racialized people who are often perceived as immigrants regardless of actual nationality — had among the most negative experiences at the library and felt least able to be fully themselves.

Glossary of terms:

LGBTQIA+ refers to people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bi+ (including other non-monosexual identities), Trans (incl. non-binary identities), Queer or Questioning, Intersex and/or Asexual, or who otherwise do not conform to dominant social norms for gender and/or sexuality. **Queer** will also be used as an umbrella term to encompass all these identities, although not all LGBTQIA+ respondents chose to claim the label queer (Norwegian: *skeiv*).

Safe space: a space (physical or digital) in which marginalized individuals or groups can reasonably expect not to meet discrimination, harassment, microaggressions, or emotional or physical harm due to aspects of their identity. A place where it is physically and emotionally safe to be oneself without needing to mask, pass, or code-switch.

The public sphere: the theory of the public sphere developed by Jürgen Habermas (1929 –), a German philosopher and sociologist, is the dominant theoretical model in the Norwegian context and describes a public sphere in which rational debate forms public opinion. Habermas argues that "we meet each other as equals and let the power of the best argument decide the winners of every discussion" (in Larsen, 2020, p. 254).

In 2005, Habermas further articulated four prerequisites or presuppositions that are most important to achieving a "rhetorically adequate process", and in turn a well-functioning public sphere (Bohman & Rehg, 2017). These are particularly relevant here:
  i. No one capable of making a relevant contribution has been excluded
  ii. Participants have equal voice
  iii. They are internally free to speak their honest opinion without deception or self-deception
  iv. There are no sources of coercion built into the process and procedures of discourse

Nancy Fraser (1990) and Janet Newman (2007), among others, have offered relevant critiques of Habermas's early theories, and Jeffrey Alexander (2001) has also made important contributions. Most relevant here is his articulation of three types of incorporation that may lead to the formation of a cohesive public or civil sphere: assimilation, hyphenation, and multicultural incorporation, the last of which is founded on mutual respect and acceptance or even celebration of difference.

Low-intensive meeting places: Norwegian LIS researcher Ragnar Audunson articulated the theory of low-intensive vs. high-intensive meeting places. Organized activities like clubs or churches are categorized as high-intensive meeting places where we are most likely to meet others similar to ourselves in some fundamental way(s). Libraries are among those low-intensive meeting places where we encounter those different from ourselves, and thus they have "a potential of making us *visible* to one another across social, ethnic, generational and value-based boundaries" (Audunson, 2005, p. 436, emphasis added). (In)visibility and (in)visiblizing queer identities are important concepts in queer theory — see Campbell & Cowan, 2016; Klatran, 2019.

Minority stress refers to a continuum of stressors that impact LGBTQIA+ people's mental health and wellbeing in society (Meyer, 2003). These range from external negative events (both chronic and acute) to individual, subjective stress processes that arise from internalization of negative societal attitudes toward marginalized individuals and groups. Meyer & Dean (1998, cited in Meyer, 2003, p. 676) specifically describe the ways in which "*expectations* of [external negative] events and the vigilance this expectation requires" contribute to chronic stress processes and internalized stigma, even among those who have never personally experienced discrimination.

Additional resources:

Visit **http://bibliotekforalle.carrd.co** for links to my full BA thesis (in Norwegian), a short video summary of key results (in English), a full bibliography, the GitHub repository containing my raw quantitative data, and other additional resources.

You can follow me and my work on Twitter @kiradelmar

Please feel free to get in touch by email – kira.delmar(at)gmail.com — if you have further questions or are interested in accessing qualitative data or collaborating on future research.

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