

Jindra Maes



Guide

Queering the Collections

Guide

Queering the Collections

Jindra Maes

Commissioned by:
IHLIA LGBTI Heritage

In cooperation with:
BHIC

Table of contents

Queering the Collections

An introduction	6
Two ways of Queering the Collections	10
Tips from the field	12

BHIC

Introduction	15
Tips for Queering the Collections	19
Challenges	27
Tips for the search engine and stories	29

In conclusion

The literature on queering	32
Future research	36
Bibliography	38

QUEER

Queering the Collections

An introduction

To make queerness more visible in collections

Historically, heterosexuality has been viewed as the norm, as “normal”. Homosexuality was abnormal or deviant from this norm. As a result, heteronormative perspectives are overrepresented within society. This overrepresentation is also present within contemporary collections of institutions like archives and museums.

Queer¹ history is less visible because of this. This does not mean that queerness did not exist in the past. Much of queer history is not documented because it was seen as unimportant or taboo. Also, the queer history that is documented is not described as such. To solve this invisibility of queer aspects of the past, many organizations in the Netherlands are taking steps towards queering the collections. This aims to make queerness more visible in collections. Queering the Collections contributes to the social acceptance of queer people and queer behaviors. It also ensures that people see themselves represented in history and current day expositions and archives.

Queering the Collections (QtC) is an initiative and a Dutch network consisting of organizations with a collection, such as archives and museums. The QtC network was launched in 2015 during a symposium held by IHLIA, the Amsterdam Museum, the Reinwardt Academie, and COMCOL (Knoop and Van den Hoonaard 2016). Today, more and more organizations voice that they want to invest in queering their collections. Many of them though have expressed not knowing where to start and what practical steps to take. Some organizations sporadically organize initiatives to give attention to queer collections, for example during Pride month. Although these efforts are a good start and show good intentions, the goal of QtC is to make queering as a sustainable and structural policy within an organization. This seems to be more difficult for organizations. Many lack the practical tools to start this process of queering. They wonder: what are the practical steps towards QtC? This guide seeks to answer this question.

¹ Within this guide, the term “queer” is used as an umbrella term for all sexual and gender identities that deviate from the norms of (hetero)sexuality, masculinity and femininity. This term is chosen in an attempt to be as inclusive as possible. It is important to know that the definition of queer is fluid and dependent on the context. Also, the terminology that is used for what we now call queer has been different throughout history and will likely change in the future.

First of all, this guide provides examples of QtC efforts from Dutch organizations with a collection. Next, it goes into an example of a successful QtC initiative at the BHIC. This shows tips for QtC and the challenges that come with it from the field. The guide then provides practical tools for QtC from the literature. Lastly, it gives advice on future research on QtC. Although this guide specifically focuses on the context of archives, the insights within this guide are relevant for all organizations with a collection. It hopes to inspire all organizations with a collection to take the first steps towards QtC.



The word "QUEER" is spelled out using small, dark, rectangular blocks, possibly made of wood or stone, arranged in a slightly curved line on a light-colored, textured surface. The letters are white and stand out against the dark blocks.

Two ways of

Queering the Collections

Looking with a queer lens

QtC efforts can be divided in two ways. Firstly, QtC is “actively collecting objects with queer meaning” (COC 2015). This is about expanding the queer collection by adding more queer objects. Many organizations with a collection (especially museums) expand their current collections by adding queer objects and expositions. For example, Museum Arnhem created an exhibition called “How dare you make me feel this way” on trans and queer joy (Museum Arnhem n.d.).

Secondly, QtC goes into “researching, describing and disclosing queer aspects of objects that are part of the collection of a museum or heritage institution” (COC 2015). This effort looks at the existing collection with a “queer lens”. For example, the Groninger Museum started the Queertour in 2022 that gives a queer perspective on the permanent collection of the museum (Groninger Museum 2022). Amsterdam Museum created an audio tour named “[IN]visible” to highlight the visible as well as less visible LGBTI-stories in the museum (Amsterdam Museum n.d.). The Rijksmuseum has a page on its website showcasing queer interpretations of historical pieces within the collection (Rijksmuseum n.d.). The Nieuwe Instituut created an initiative called “Seen/Unseen” that viewed the National Collection from an intersectional-feminist and (gender)queer perspective (Nieuwe Instituut n.d.). Archives are also concerned with making the queer aspects more visible within the collections. For example, the Regional Archive Tilburg held a symposium in collaboration with COC Tilburg-Breda on research about sexual and gender diversity in archival sources (Regionaal Archief Tilburg 2019).

Expanding the collection with queer pieces seems to be more accessible for most organizations than finding queerness in the existing collections. This is because a queer lens challenges the ways you look at the world and requires new ways of looking. Both ways can be done sporadically or as an integral approach of an organization. It is important to focus on the structural changes organizations can make so that queering becomes a sustainable and organization wide approach.

Q U E E R

Tips from the field

Experts from the QtC Network give tips on successfully queering the collections based on experiences from the field

be present. This means organizations need pre-existing knowledge about the historical and social context of what they are researching. For example, it is important to know what terms were used throughout history for what we now call “queer”, depending on the era that is researched. This information is needed before organizations can start with historical research on queer aspects within de collection (Knoop and Van den Hoonaard 2016).

Sustainable and organization wide policy

To queer the collection in a sustainable way, queering needs to become an organization wide policy. QtC has to be seen as important within all layers of the organization and become an integral aspect of new initiatives. It is thus vital to stay away from performative policy that is never truly implemented. QtC is a true change in looking at the collection from an organization wide perspective.

There is no one size fits all approach

The ways in which an organization can start queering their collection depends highly on the collection itself and historical and cultural context of the organization (IHLIA LGBTI Heritage 2022, 5). It depends on the specificity of the collection how you can search and what you can search for. Therefore, an organization has to know its collection, and research in what ways queer aspects could



Tips from the field

BHIC

Q U E E R

Insights

As shown above, most of the QtC initiatives are done by museums. Since archival institutions are different from museums, QtC needs specific approaches and poses specific challenges for archives. The example of QtC within the BHIC gives important and much needed insights on how archives can queer their collections.

Introduction

THE HISTORICAL INFORMATION CENTRE OF BRABANT

The Historical Information Centre of Brabant (BHIC, Brabants Historisch Informatie Centrum in Dutch) is the archive that preserves and manages the history of the province North-Brabant. The BHIC is the second largest archive in The Netherlands. In addition to managing this archive, the BHIC undertakes projects on specific topics, themed websites, presents stories based on archival documents on its website, and assists everyone from the general public to experienced researchers that want to use the archive.

Since September 2022, the BHIC has been actively engaged in Queering the Collections. This is part of a broader goal to bring underrepresented voices in the archive to light and make the archive a more inclusive space for everyone. The BHIC calls this goal “polyphony” (meerstemmigheid). Additionally, the BHIC strives to inspire others to conduct their own research on queer history in both BHIC’s archive and in other collections and archives.

The initiative at the BHIC is a unique example of what QtC can look like within an archival organization. It shows valuable insights into how other archives and organizations with a collection can engage with QtC in a sustainable way. This guide highlights how the BHIC approached QtC and the challenges they faced in this process. It also explains why this approach was successful, so that other organizations with a collection can learn from the QtC initiative at the BHIC.

QUEERING THE COLLECTIONS AT THE BHIC

QtC at the BHIC is mainly carried out by two interns: Maxime van Loenhout from Utrecht University and Roxanne Lokin from Uppsala University, Sweden. The QtC initiative was managed by archivist and

Project Manager Thijs de Leeuw. All three employees have been consulted to make this guide. Christian van der Ven, head of public services, has also been consulted.

The BHIC defines the term “queer” as: “everyone that is not heterosexual and/or cisgender (people who feel comfortable with the assigned sex at birth)”. Sources on queer identities or behavior are poorly visible and hard to find within the archive. The BHIC explains why. This is partly caused by the historical context and partly by the archive’s structure. Historically, queer sources have been difficult to find because used to be a taboo around discussing sexuality, sex, and gender diverse behavior. In general, all sexualities that deviated from the (cis/hetero) norm were considered taboo. It appears that these forms of behavior are difficult to find in historical sources. This for example becomes clear in the research by Luc Brants (2018) on homosexuality in Brabant. This research demonstrates that court sentences derived from discriminatory legislation against homosexuality use ambiguous terms such as “lewd behavior” to describe homosexual behavior. Homosexuality is not explicitly mentioned in these sentences. So, there is little material documented on queer history, and the material that does exist is often difficult to find.

The difficulty in finding queer sources is also a problem that arises from the way the archive is structured. For example, to find queer historical sources, we need different search terms than the ones we use today. Additionally, sources within the archive are not labeled with terms that indicate sexuality, sex, and gender diverse behavior like “queer,” or “homosexual”. Therefore, one must search the archive based on prior historical knowledge and use terms that were commonly used back then.

IMPROVING FINDABILITY AND VISIBILITY

Through QtC, the BHIC aims to make queer sources within the archive more findable and visible. The BHIC approaches this in two

ways: by increasing the findability and visibility of the queer material² that already exists within the archive, and by expanding the archive’s queer material in general.

The first element of QtC is increasing the findability and visibility of queer material within the existing archive:

- The BHIC improves the findability of the queer material within the archive through the [Queer Search engine](#). This search engine helps researchers to know where and how they can find queer sources within BHIC’s archive (and in other archives and collections). For example, the BHIC explains which archives are (potentially) relevant. This search engine also provides a list with historical terms that proved to be relevant while searching queer sources within BHIC’s archive. The search engine also comprehensively explains the importance of highlighting queer aspects within the archive as well as the difficulties that come with this.
- The BHIC improves the visibility of queer material within the archive by writing [stories](#) based on queer archival sources. These stories are posted on BHIC’s website. Currently, people can find them by typing “queer” in the search bar.

The BHIC points out that all material on QtC like the stories and search engine will eventually have a separate webpage, just like there are already webpages for other themes such as “Rebellious women” and “Squatting movements”. This webpage will contribute to both the findability and visibility of queer history in the archive.

The BHIC highlights the queer sources through stories and helps others with finding queer sources through the Queer Search

² Here queer material means: all material (possibly) about sexuality, sex, and gender diversity.

engine. Next, the BHIC recommends queer history as a theme to new research fellows. These efforts show that the BHIC takes initiative in improving the findability and visibility of the queer sources themselves as well as encouraging others to research queer history. This combination makes QtC at the BHIC an initiative for everyone.

The second element of BHIC's QtC is expanding the queer collection. This includes acquisition from the public. The BHIC calls upon the public to share stories or material related to queer topics. These documents range from photos to papers/written documents like autobiographical documents, letters, documentations, posters and magazines/journals. "This ranges from complete, to more or less structured (private) archives to a handful of unstructured material 'that someone has laying around in their attic'" (Thijs de Leeuw).

Building a network is of great importance in this acquisition. Acquisition goes beyond simply calling upon the public: it "primarily involves establishing contacts, gaining trust, and expanding the network" (Christian van der Ven). The importance of letting people tell their own story instead of speaking on their behalf, is explicitly stated.

This also aligns with the emerging initiative called "oral history", in which peoples are interviewed. "Recording and preserving personal stories" are important objectives in this initiative (Thijs de Leeuw). Sometimes these interviews are connected to acquisition, in which someone talks about materials they handed over and how that (private) collection came into existence. The knowledge of queer history of Brabant is expanded through these approaches.

Tips for Queering the Collections

A few features made QtC at the BHIC a success. These are explained in the following chapter.

I. ONE OVERARCHING POLICY

The QtC initiative at the BHIC is part of BHIC's broader goal of "polyphony" within the archive. Polyphony of the archive is about increasing the visibility of multiple underrepresented groups such as queer/LGBTIQ+ persons, people of color, migrants, refugees, travelers (an umbrella term that refers to for instance caravan dwellers, Sinti and Roma), squatters' movements, environmental movements, and more. Polyphony intentionally and explicitly pays more attention to all groups and individuals who, for various reasons, are not well represented or poorly visible in the archive, or whose representation is one-sided. This goal of polyphony is included in the current policy plan of 2023-2026.

The overarching policy of polyphony has pros and cons for taking on QtC in a sustainable way. On the one hand, an overarching policy ensures a widely shared goal of more inclusivity and highlighting diverse voices. This prevents one-time projects that pink wash, since it is sustainable policy within the organization. On the other hand, highlighting as much diverse voices as possible is more work. Organizations can see this as an obstacle in taking the first step.

SUMMARY

→ **Make QtC part of an overarching goal of diversity and inclusion, so that it becomes a sustainable part of everyday tasks.**

II. SUSTAINABLE POLICY THROUGH BOTTOM-UP APPROACH

The policy plan of the BHIC alone does not make QtC successful. It is necessary to be critical of policy plans. Although they show good intentions, policy plans do not show the reality of the steps taken towards a more inclusive and diverse archive or the results of these efforts. BHIC's policy plan however is successful. This is because of the ways the policy came about and how it became sustainable within the organization.

An important aspect of how the BHIC has been able to establish QtC in a sustainable manner is the fact that polyphony gradually gained more attention within the employees' work. This increased attention came from the interests and values from the employees themselves. The interest in - until then - underrepresented groups grew throughout the years. This process roughly started in 2018 with an interest in Rebelling women in Brabant during the second wave of feminism. Through networking, this topic expanded to projects dedicated to emancipatory and protest movements in Brabant: squatters, peace activists, environmental activists, and the gay and lesbian movement followed.

The involvement with other social movements and minority groups helped with queering the collections, because it resulted in a broad network of contacts who were knowledgeable about the gay and lesbian movement. The topic of Rebelling women in Brabant ultimately became the broader goal of polyphony within the current policy plan. The BHIC acts based on what they consider important values. The value of polyphony arose from the growing realization that the archive lacks important pieces of history. For instance, Maxime van Loenhout says: "Everyone deserves to recognize themselves in the past."

Next, the BHIC explicitly voices wanting to avoid pinkwashing "or any other type of washing" (Thijs de Leeuw), in which integrity is central. BHIC's employees involved with QtC are genuinely

interested in changing the one-sided representation within the archive. They also recognize its broader societal significance. Christian van der Ven emphasizes not only the importance of archival duties, but also the societal responsibility of the BHIC. He states: "It is part of our mission to contribute to an inclusive society; a society in which everyone can freely engage in identity exploration and discovery through our collective collections, and meet and relate to others through this process." The aim is to make polyphony structural within the organization, so that "diversity becomes the new normal," says Thijs de Leeuw.

Diversity, polyphony, and attention to QtC became more solid over time. It now has a more central position within the organization. QtC is a gradual process in which small steps are continuously taken in the right direction. Additionally, the initiative originated from the values and interests of the employees themselves. This combination allowed QtC to become sustainable within the organization and its policy plan.

SUMMARY

- **Make QtC organization wide policy.**
- **Dare to take the first step. QtC needs time to develop sustainably.**

III. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The organizational culture is a crucial factor contributing to making the policy plan sustainable at the BHIC. Both interns and permanent employees have a lot of freedom in choosing what they work on. The employees have significant input in the content of the projects they work on, and the interns are trusted with creating QtC. This freedom to start the QtC initiative is a prerequisite for its success.

Also, the interns had a say in the content of their internship, enabling them to pursue research topics they were interested in. In addition to their interest in the history of Brabant and research on minority groups, both interns had experience with historical research due to their studies in history and early modern history. This shows that both skills and interest are important in creating the QtC initiative.

Both interns mention support from the organization as a crucial aspect for a successful internship project. Project Manager Thijs de Leeuw was not only involved in the project because of his enthusiasm, he also had the space to help the interns get familiar with the organization and to introduce them to his established network.

Dedicated employees are necessary to make QtC successful. Roxanne Lokin refers to it as "internal enthusiasm". Bringing diverse voices to the forefront within the archive is not an easy task. Nonetheless, the employees at the BHIC have taken on this task passionately. Driven employees and interns contribute to the success of the QtC project at BHIC. The open-mindedness of the employees has also played a significant role. Employees who were not directly involved in QtC still provided input and showed interest in the topic. Employees like these are vital to make sure the QtC initiative is kept alive.

SUMMARY

- **Hire driven employees and interns that are passionate about QtC.**
- **Give them space, freedom, and trust. But support as well!**

IV. SELF-REFLECTION AND A CRITICAL LOOK INTO THE ARCHIVE

Another important aspect that makes the QtC initiative at the BHIC successful, is the ability to critically self-reflect on the organizational foundations and underlying systems of the archive. The challenges faced by QtC "touch the core of what the archive is, who we claim to be or think we are," Thijs de Leeuw states. He emphasizes the importance of reflecting on the historical origins of the archive and the "criteria used to preserve the archives". This reflection reveals why certain groups are underrepresented within the archive.

The BHIC reflects on who historically determined what should and should not be preserved, and in what ways. This primarily involved "white men of a certain age and with a certain level of education" (Thijs de Leeuw). The archive is not neutral. Rather, it is influenced by a specific perspective. Historical narratives are constructed based on archival documents. In order to diversify history, it is therefore crucial to highlight diverse voices and expose biased archival structures from the past. The BHIC has become increasingly aware of this. It actively challenges the norm by examining the archival materials from a queer perspective. Maxime van Loenhout states that while it is important for archives and research institutions to preserve history, there should "also be some sort of sense of ownership, to do something with it". The BHIC takes this responsibility seriously.

The BHIC engages in private acquisition through calling upon the public to share their documents to fill the gaps in the archive and make it more diverse. This is done with a critical perspective: Who wants to share personal sources with the BHIC? Who feels at home doing so? This leads to the question of whether the archive is a safe space. Thijs de Leeuw points out that "for many people, it is not". The BHIC is aware that those who can contribute to making the archive more diverse traditionally do not identify with what the

archive manages and the way it is managed. It involves “earning trust,” Christian van der Ven states. The BHIC recognizes that this trust is not self-evident and that building it takes time. The organization addresses this issue internally.

Additionally, the BHIC reflects on the subtitle of the organization: “The Memory of Brabant” (Het Geheugen van Brabant). What truly constitutes the memory of Brabant? Over time the BHIC realized that this subtitle had to be relativized, as many voices were still not represented by the archive. Hence, the new policy document for 2023-2026 is titled “Our Brabant Too” (Ook óns Brabant), which emphasizes the importance of a plurality of voices within the archive.

The importance of an inclusive and safe environment where everyone is able to recognize themselves is thus not only reflected in the QtC project, but in various other initiatives within the organization.

SUMMARY

- **Reflect on the organizational and the structures that came with it.**
- **Take a critical look into who the organization attracts, who feels at home within the organization and who feels represented. Reflect on what was the cause.**

V. A LOGICAL STEP

QtC is not a one-size-fits-all initiative. The implementation of QtC depends on the activities and structure of each specific organization. When deciding how to approach QtC, an organization can reflect on whom they want to attract, what aligns with their

collection, and what suits their organization. BHIC’s choice to focus on the development of the queer search engine and the queer stories is a logical step within their organization. The BHIC values a positive search experience for interested individuals who are interested in the archive. This becomes clear from features like the chat function on their website, where people can ask questions to staff, and the forum page, where anyone can seek help from others. The BHIC already had multiple search engines available on their website to assist people in navigating the archive before the queer search engines was developed. Additionally, they have an “assistance with research” (hulp bij onderzoek) page. Hence, creating a queer search engine is a logical choice for the BHIC as part of their QtC initiative.

The stories about queer topics based on BHIC’s archival material is also a logical step for them, since the BHIC already has an entire page dedicated to stories on their website. Furthermore, both the search engine and the stories align well with BHIC’s focus on catering to both “experienced researchers” and a broader audience. The search guide is mainly geared towards researchers, while the stories target a wider public.

Having a clear goal is also crucial when implementing a QtC initiative. This has helped the BHIC in their QtC initiative, as the interns knew what they were working towards and what the end product would look like. Having a goal also facilitates a reflection on what aligns with the organization and what is realistically achievable. Once a goal is achieved, new goals can be set to ensure that QtC remains an ongoing process.

SUMMARY

- **Select an approach to QtC that aligns with the structure and activities of the organization to ensure a natural integration of QtC.**
- **Set a clear goal for the approach to QtC.**

VI. CREATIVITY

The BHIC has a goal to reach a broad public, more diverse public, and a more satisfied public. An example of a project that has gained significant popularity is the “Incense, Holy Water, and Sausage Rolls - The rich Catholic life in Brabant 1900-1970” (Wierook, Wijwater en Worstebrood - Het rijke roomse leven in Brabant 1900-1970) project. This project attracts a large public and even has a website dedicated to the topic. The BHIC holds a wealth of information in its archives about the Catholic history of Brabant, which generates significant interest among individuals who have a personal connection to the topic and can share their own stories about it. The public that has traditionally shown more interest in archives that align well with the topic, contributing to the project's popularity.

In contrast, the stories on queer history (which will eventually have their own separate webpage) may not garner as much popularity among a broad public. The BHIC chooses to focus on a varied public and on the goal of polyphony through this topic instead. The interpretation of “more diverse public” has evolved over time within the BHIC. Previously, it mainly referred to attracting a public “with a lower average educational level than archive services traditionally attracted” (Christian van der Ven). The BHIC realized that “more diverse” goes beyond how it was previously understood. This was influenced by both broader societal developments of focusing on diversity and inclusion, as by their own experiences. This goal of more diversity is now more broadly promoted through the QtC initiative.

BHIC's goal is to maintain a large public while attracting a varied public. This poses challenges. Firstly, it requires sufficient resources. The BHIC shows this is possible, for example by appointing enthusiastic and skilled interns.

Secondly, the content focused on a smaller public requires a different perspective. As there is limited information available, one needs to be more creative with utilizing the resources that are available. Scarce information does not diminish the importance of the topic. The BHIC shows that it is still possible to tell stories when there is little material to work with and emphasizes the importance of it.

SUMMARY

- **Reflect on the choices about wanting to attract a big audience or a varied one. Find a balance that fits the organization.**
- **Search for ways to increase access to resources to focus on the small-scale audience. For instance, through hiring interns.**

Challenges

The BHIC has made significant progress in increasing the visibility of queerness within the archive of Brabant. However, they also face challenges. The BHIC hopes to keep learning about QtC, partly from future QtC initiatives undertaken by other archives and organizations with collections.

THE ARCHIVE'S STRUCTURE

The biggest challenge the BHIC faces is changing the current structure of the archive. These changes would ensure that queer

material would be easy to find in the future. The content of the queer search engine would then shift to making queer history more visible in different ways. One way to improve the findability of queer material is to relabel all archival material: assigning the label “queer” to relevant items. However, the task of relabeling all archival material is (at least for now) a too big. The BHIC does take steps towards this goal by having an increased attention to queer aspects that might be present within newly acquired materials. Labeling presents another difficulty. Describing the past as “queer” carries the risk of misinterpretation. Therefore, reflection is needed on how the archive can label in an ethical manner and on what this entails within the organization.

RESOURCES

Another challenge with QtC is keeping it at the forefront within the organization. This requires sufficient resources including funding and time, but also dedicated individuals who are willing to make QtC a success. The future of QtC depends on the availability of resources. This is partly dependent on the policy: What does an organization consider important? Where does an organization allocate its attention? And does an organization have the means to integrate QtC into everyday tasks, making it the new normal?

Moreover, QtC relies on finding motivated and skilled individuals. While it is acknowledged several times that appointing interns is a good step toward QtC, we also need to be critical of this approach. What can an organization expect from interns whose primary goal is to learn? And what happens to the project when the internship period ends?

Tips for the search engine and stories

The queer search engine on BHIC’s website shows the challenges involved in searching for queer material within the archive and provides tips on how to approach them. Similar challenges emerged during the development of the search engine itself and in the process of writing the stories.

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Prior knowledge of queer history is important when searching for queer archival materials. In fact, knowledge served as the basis for developing the search engine itself. For example, when researching queer history in Brabant, knowledge of the specific history of Brabant was important. The knowledge required in finding queer sources varies from archive to archive. The BHIC gained their knowledge with the help of experts and research on queer history. An example of an expert that helped the BHIC is Luc Brants, a researcher specializing in homosexuality in Brabant. He provided insights based on his own experience and knowledge of where the history of homosexuality is hidden within the archive. With this knowledge as a base, the search engine was able to continue to expand.

On the other hand, it is also important to approach the search process exploratively beyond this basic knowledge. The search engine also emerged from knowledge gained from previously discovered sources, which provided new search terms. For example, during their search, the interns discovered that the term “sodomy” could be a relevant term when searching for queer sources in the archive. Initially, they had not considered this term. This explorative way of researching allowed the interns to get familiar with BHIC’s collection, which benefited the initiative.

DOCUMENTATION

In addition to developing the search engine, stories were written based on queer materials within BHIC's archive. This ensured active engagement with the archival materials. It is important to keep track of where queer materials are found. It is also vital to reflect on why they are found there and not elsewhere.

LANGUAGE

The queer stories on the website delve into materials found in BHIC's archive. These stories are labeled with terms such as Homosexuality, LGBTIQ+, Queer, Crossdressing, Homosexual behavior and Lesbian. The choices around these labels depend on the historical context of the source. For example, when someone self-identifies as lesbian within a source, the BHIC can call this person lesbian within the story. In other sources, there may only be indications of queer-related subjects, such as homosexual feelings, without explicit mention of homosexuality in the source itself.

When sources are interpreted today as queer, it is important to be cautious with labeling. As a result, some stories explicitly discuss queerness, while in other stories, it is woven into the narrative without explicitly calling individuals or actions queer. The BHIC has found a middle ground, where aspects that could potentially be queer are labeled as such on the website but not explicitly called queer within the story itself. This approach takes into account the possibility of misinterpretation while ensuring the visibility of queer history through labelling the stories.

BUILD UPON THE BHIC

Finally, the BHIC has one last crucial tip for other organizations who want to queer their collections: build upon the existing queer search engine! Use the search engine and search terms developed by the BHIC as a basis for your own QtC initiative. This basis can then be expanded and adapted to fit your own collection. The BHIC

is eager to learn from other organizations working on QtC. Roxanne Lokin says: "We have created the framework. With that, we hope that other people can take it up and further develop it so that we can make the search engine more complete." So, get started and work together to create an even more comprehensive understanding of queer history.

The literature on queering

Q U E E R

Sustainably

The literature shows the importance of queering the archive and museums (Arondekar et al. 2015; Mills 2006; Zepeda 2018). It points out how institutions can sustainably queer their collections.

REFLECTING ON ORGANISZATIONAL FOUNDATION

The ways archives are constructed and the perspectives that are behind this determine the way others can use the archive and what they are able find (Mills 2006). This makes it important for archives

to specifically reflect on their historical foundations. They need to investigate what has historically been stored and why. The way collections are stored is also important. The structure of the archive and the categories that are used determine what can be found. .

Reflecting on these organizational structures and foundations is part of reflecting on ideas about neutrality. The norm is often viewed as neutral. Archival norms are set in place with the idea of neutrality as well. De literature on queering shows that neutrality does not exist, since there are always biases at play (Zepeda 2018, 95). Archives are not only depositories of documents, but are also "themselves historical agents, organized around unwritten logics of inclusion and exclusion, with the power to exalt certain stories, experiences, and events and to bury others" (Arondekar et al. 2015, 214). Archival institutions have traditionally "reaffirmed hegemonic power structures by erasing and ignoring histories of marginalized communities" (Zepeda 2018, 94).

Queering has been called "looking between the lines" (ibid., 95) or "reading against the grain" (Arondekar et al. 2015, 214). Going against the presumed neutrality of the archive and reflecting on the biases that formed the archive can help with queering the archive (Zepeda 2018, 94). This calls for critical engagement with what has historically been worth archiving or collecting, why this was seen as valuable and what histories stayed concealed because of these choices.

NOT ESSENTIALIZING THE QUEER EXPERIECE

Queer is inherently undefined. This could make it more difficult for organizations to identify what exactly the term queer means. As organizations want to queer their collections, it is vital to understand the nuances of the concept "queer" to avoid essentializing queerness. This is why the way an organization presents queer objects needs to be well thought out. The queer

objects within an archive “are best presented as partial and fragmented, discursive and desirous, rather than as manifestations of some objective homosexual essence” (Mills 2006, 260). When interpreting history with a queer lens, we need to be mindful of the historical context to avoid essentializing queerness based on contemporary lenses. It is not about finding out who was queer in history, but about discussions of why and how we find queers in history (ibid., 261).

TAKING A POLITICAL STANCE

For archiving and conducting research within the archive it is important to realize the social context of heteronormativity. If collections are not built and researched through this lens, there is a chance heterosexuality is rearticulated as the standard again and again. A specific queer lens helps to make sure that heteronormativity is not rearticulated through archiving and archival research. This means that to make sure heteronormativity is challenged within the archive, archives need to actively go against the norm, and contest heterosexuality as a default (Zepeda 2018, 95). As one can image, actively going against the norm through queering is a political act (Watts 2018). QtC is more difficult if organizations are not ready for this political stance. To make QtC a success, organizations should voice queering as a goal and take active steps towards this goal.





Future research

Best approaches

Many organizations have voiced their intentions to work towards a more diverse and inclusive world through queering their collections. This guide aims to help organizations to start this process. As more and more organizations gain practical experience with QtC, the knowledge on the best approaches in queering the collections will expand.

The explorative research that this guide is based on focused on what works and what does not work for organizations with ambitions for QtC. Different approaches for QtC are needed depending on the type of organization. Diverse types of organizations with collections like archives, museums and heritage institutions are all different from each other. Since the BHIC is an archival institution, this guide mainly focused on approached for organizations with an archive and their specific needs in queering their collections. This does not mean the practical advice given within this guide is not relevant for other organizations with a collection. Nevertheless, it would be valuable for future research to go more in depth about the diverse approaches and outcomes of QtC depending on the organizational structures. This type of research would for example show the specific approaches for archives, museums and heritage institutions separately.

A good way of researching what works best for organizations that want to bring more attention to the queer aspects within their collections, is a “best practice” research. A best practice research evaluates what works and what does not work for a specific outcome (Madera 2013; Krietz 2008). The information about what works is often derived from practical experience (Krietz 2008, 103). In order to decide on what works best, we need to compare the approaches and outcomes of multiple organizations that are involved with QtC. This guide in which the QtC initiative of the BHIC is evaluated, is a good start for this process. For a best practice, the practices of the BHIC would be compared to evaluations of other initiatives to conclude on what works best within the field of archival institutions.



Bibliography

Amsterdam Museum. z.j. "[IN]visible @ Amsterdam Museum." Accessed on May 13, 2023. <https://hart.amsterdam/nl/page/55621/in-visible-audio-guide-at-amsterdam-museum>.

Arondekar, Anjali, Ann Cvetkovich, Christina B. Hanhardt, Regina Kunzel, Tavia Nyong'o, Juana María Rodríguez, and Susan Stryker. 2015. "Queering Archives: A Roundtable Discussion." *Radical History Review* 122: 211-231. DOI: 10.1215/01636545-2849630.

Brants, Luc. 2018. "Homoseksualiteit in Brabant: Van doodzwijgen naar roze maandag." In *Brabant: Tijdschrift voor Brabants heem en erfgoed*, 8-17. <https://www.bhic.nl/integrated?mizig=82&miadt=235&miaet=14&micode=1142&minr=16986625&miview=ldt>.

COC. 2015. "Queering the collections - seksuele en genderidentiteit in erfgoed." March 12. <https://coc.nl/queering-thecollections-seksuele-en-genderidentiteit-in-erfgoed/>.

Groninger Museum. 2022. "Groninger Museum start met Queertour." December 7. <https://www.groningermuseum.nl/pers/groninger-museum-start-met-queertour>.

Groninger Museum. n.d. "Queertour – Gianni Versace Retrospective." Accessed on May 11, 2023. <https://www.groningermuseum.nl/bezoek/activiteiten/queertour-gianni-versace-retrospective-2>.

IHLIA LGBTI Heritage. 2022. "Opbrengst Workshop Queering the Collections + Bericht COC Rotterdam."

Madera, M. Juan. 2013. "Best Practices in Diversity Management in Customer Service Organizations: An Investigation of Top Companies Cited by Diversity Inc." *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly* 54(2):124-135.

Mills, Robert. 2006. "Queer is here? Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender." *History Workshop Journal* 62(1):253-263. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbl006>.

Museum Arnhem. n.d. "How dare you make me feel this way." Accessed on May 13, 2023. <https://www.museumarnhem.nl/nl/tentoonstellingen/how-dare-you-make-me-feel-this-way>.

Nieuwe Instituut. n.d. "Collection Otherwise." [https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/projects/collecting-otherwise/seenunseen?mtm_campaign=02-1NLTentoonstellingen&mtm_source=cpc&mtm_medium=google&mtm_group=Tentoonstellingen\(DSA\)&gclid=Cj0KCQjwr82iBhCuARIsAO0EAZxSNH55t7a34wwbl_LLPPv5XHWzzGt2i4Cl1IQ3VmrojKbA8PCm09saAhHdEALw_wcB](https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/projects/collecting-otherwise/seenunseen?mtm_campaign=02-1NLTentoonstellingen&mtm_source=cpc&mtm_medium=google&mtm_group=Tentoonstellingen(DSA)&gclid=Cj0KCQjwr82iBhCuARIsAO0EAZxSNH55t7a34wwbl_LLPPv5XHWzzGt2i4Cl1IQ3VmrojKbA8PCm09saAhHdEALw_wcB)

Regionaal Archief Tilburg. 2019. "Symposiumbundel Uit de kast! Beschikbaar." Accessed on June 22, 2023. <https://www.regionaalarchieftilburg.nl/home/blog-detail/algemeen/2019/05/14/symposiumbundel-uit-de-kast!-beschikbaar/>.

Rijksmuseum. n.d. "Queering the Rijksmuseum." Accessed on May 13, 2023. <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio/989610-niels-van-maanen/collections/queering-the-rijksmuseum?ii=0&p=0>.

Krietz, Patricia. 2008. "Best practices for Managing Organizational Diversity." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 34(2):101-120.

Watts, Gina. 2018. "Queer Lives in Archives: Intelligibility and Forms of Memory." *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory* 27: 103-111. <https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.27>.

Zepeda, Lizeth. 2018. "Queering the Archive: Transforming the Archival Process." *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory* 27: 94-102. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.27>.

Guide Queering the Collections

Jindra Maes

Commissioned by::
IHLIA LGBTI Heritage

In cooperation with:
BHIC