

10-15-2012

LGBT Life with Full Text

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Recommended Citation

Harrick, M. (2012). LGBT Life with Full Text. *Charleston Advisor*, 14(2), 40-43.

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ADVISOR REVIEWS—STANDARD REVIEW

LGBT Life with Full Text

doi:10.5260/chara.14.2.40

Date of Review: October 15, 2012

Composite Score:

★★★ 7/8

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Abstract

LGBT Life with Full Text, an EBSCO Industries product, is currently the premiere database not just for scholarly research in the field of LGBT and queer studies, but as a digital archive for a large corpus of LGBT primary sources, historically important monographs, magazines, and newspapers, and other materials available only in archives and libraries.

Pricing Options

A one-year subscription to this database, for a public college with 17,000 students, is priced at \$6,510, though prospective subscribers are advised to contact an EBSCO representative to discuss possible discounts or other pricing options. The database is not available as a one-time purchase. The price will surely be manageable for libraries with large budgets, especially those who do not mind paying for databases which might duplicate holdings already purchased or subscribed to in other databases. However, for libraries hit by budget cuts, or those needing to ensure that most of what they pay for is unique to their current collections, the price might be steep. Libraries can contact the vendor to request a free, 60-day trial subscription.

Product Description

Every year since the mid-1980s, LGBT or queer studies as a recognized field of academic and historical research has increased in importance, depth, and nuance. The discipline touches every aspect of public, private, academic, and social lives. As more people conduct research in the field and as more research is produced every year, the need for a database that satisfies the needs of researchers, provides access to scholarly materials, and makes available valuable, sometimes rare, primary and secondary sources is unquestionable. EBSCO has stepped in to make use of its expertise in the world of scholarly databases to offer what no other vendor is currently offering: access to LGBT history and scholarship with breadth and depth that exists nowhere else. LGBT Life with Full Text is currently the best at making accessible to more people these rich and important resources.

The database, inaugurated in 2004 under the name GLBT Life, is the full text counterpart to EBSCO's LGBT Life. LGBT Life with Full Text contains the entire LGBT Life collection: indexing and abstracting for over 200 periodicals, and 360 monographs and reference books that are of the utmost importance to the field of LGBT studies. LGBT Life with Full Text goes above and beyond its fellow database, adding 55 more journals, magazines, and regional newspapers, and more than 100 full text monographs and books; the collection also contains speeches, photographs, interviews, and poetry. To ensure that the database reflects the diversity of the field, and to ensure

it indexes materials that might be important to the field, but perhaps unfamiliar to the database's creators, LGBT Life with Full Text was created with the help of two vanguard institutions devoted to preserving LGBT history: the One National Gay & Lesbian Archives and the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

The database focuses on resources of special interest to the field that are unlikely to be found elsewhere in such depth. Some topics covered are AIDS, Gay and Lesbian Youth, and Queer People of Color. This product's content also transcends American borders and touches upon materials produced in Asia, Europe, and Australia.

Critical Evaluation

Currently, this database is quite possibly the best one-stop source for interested researchers at any level: independent scholar, high school student, college-level instructor. The interface for LGBT Life with Full Text will be familiar to users of any of EBSCO's other popular databases (save for those set aside for children, like Searchasaurus or Kids Search, which, not surprisingly, have completely different interfaces). There are Basic and Advanced Search options, as well as a Visual Search option, which users can choose to display their results in Blocks or Columns; with a Right/Left orientation of images; and in a Single/Multiple column layout. The results are displayed in a Results Map, which users can move around to order in ways that work for them. This feature accommodates those users who prefer a more graphic display.

The list of limiters is impressive, and goes well beyond more commonly found choices such as Full Text, Peer Reviewed, Abstract, and Article. Highlighting the database's wide range of focus are limiters such as Black and White Photograph; Color Photograph; Book; Interview; Letter; Obituary; Poem; Short Story; and Speech. As many researchers of LGBT history know, these limiters will have great importance for many reasons: a history fraught with conflict and tragedy, as well as celebration, should not only have its artifacts described with accuracy, but should be represented by all the various formats used to record it. There is so much more to LGBT history and scholarship than just reviewed articles or essays, and LGBT Life with Full Text meets the challenge to be as inclusive as possible.

However, most of what the database offers does take the form of written research, be it scholarly, peer reviewed research, or less formal and anecdotal artifacts. Though the database has an impressive array of publications, some of this material can be found in other databases. Of the 650 or so publications (journals, magazines, books/monographs) accessible through the database, 96 of them are indexed elsewhere, some in databases owned by EBSCO or other vendors, and even some in some Open Access repositories. This is a relative-

ly small number of publications that have multiple existences (it is roughly 14%), but for some collection development departments that take close looks at database offerings to ensure there is little duplication in their own collections, this might be a stumbling block. Where LGBT Life with Full Text really excels is that it provides access to many journals and serials that were published by small, local presses, some which had short runs, and which, if not for careful selection, would not otherwise reach such a large audience. There are some important serials such as *Off Our Backs*, a lesbian feminist publication that ran for almost forty years; *Body Politic*, a formative Canadian serial from just post-Stonewall to the mid-1980s; and *Christopher Street*, a hugely influential New York City publication with an almost 20-year run. These publications can be critically important to research, and it is imperative they be made accessible.

The database provides an alphabetical list of searchable publications, including the option to create an RSS journal alert (though users will need to create/sign into an EBSCOhost account to access this feature). Next to each publication in the list is a date range for the bibliographic records available. Users can also browse publications by Subject & Description, as well as searching using the “Match Any Words” feature. Clicking on the title of each publication will give the user the following information: title, publisher information, bibliographic records (dates), publication type, title history (if the publication had multiple titles, as did many LGBT serials and newsletters, LGBT Life with Full Text will link to analog titles, if access is available), subjects, frequency, and if the publication is peer reviewed. Some records have brief one- or two-sentence descriptions. Users can search or browse within each publication, and each publication is also indexed by year in the typical EBSCO fashion (each year expands to show all available volumes and issues).

The fact that many of the older journals and magazines are found in PDF format makes browsing of original materials easy, and allows readers to see the content in its original form. This feature, though common among full text databases, is uniquely important for this database since many early publications are handwritten and hand-typed, and include drawings and photographs. For example, such landmark publications as *ONE* (begun in 1953), the *Mattachine Review* (first published in 1955), and *Ladder* (born in 1956) had a huge impact on pre-Stonewall gay rights in America, and LGBT Life with Full Text provides full, complete coverage beginning with the first issue of each. These serials were published without the aid of established presses and all their resources, and contain content that is handwritten or illustrated. Without PDF full text, much of this content would be lost.

This resource is relatively current. Because much of what it indexes takes the form of publications with weekly or monthly outputs, it is not surprising that there will be a delay for some materials published by these sources. This should not dissuade users from searching for current topics, though. A quick search for “Republican National Convention” AND 2012 returned no results, but there were results for the Democratic National Convention, from one week prior to the conducted search (August, 2012), in full-text, so there is no apparent official embargo. Other searches for “Same-sex Marriage” AND Romney (298 results, the most recent from July, 2012), and Republican* AND “Same-sex Marriage” (1,185 results, the most recent from the middle of August, 2012) show that the database does provide full-text access not just to historically important serials and publications, but to currently active publications and small, local presses that feature LGBT-related news and opinions. However, users should aug-

ment their searches for the most current articles with databases that update daily.

One of the more important considerations when working within this field is the attention that must be paid to the terms used by academics and other researchers, as well as members of the community. Many terms (gay, lesbian, queer) have multiple meanings, some relatively stable, others more fluid. There is also no consensus (and probably never will be) as to not only the order of the initials used to describe the field (is it LGBT, GLBT...?), but also to the length and scope of inclusion (does it stop at T, or continue with Q, for Queer/Questioning; does it add an I, for Intersex?). EBSCO has decided to pick LGBT, and uses it, for the most part, consistently; most importantly with regard to search terms. LGBT Life with Full Text includes a thesaurus with over 7,500 terms. Even within the thesaurus, users who search for the term GLBT are directed to use LGBT, even though the title of the thesaurus is “GLBT Thesaurus” (one instance of inconsistency with the terminology). The thesaurus itself has to be a fluid document, in order to reflect the nuance and plasticity of terms used by the LGBT community, as well as be able to respond quickly to the phenomenon where terms change meaning, and older terms fall out of style and are replaced by newer, hopefully more sensitive and inclusive terms.

Users can browse the thesaurus (by Term Begins With, Term Contains, and Relevancy Ranked). There is an alphabetical listing and links to officially used terms. Some terms, when clicked, have a Scope note that describes the term, and what articles, etc., might be linked to it. Within are links to Broader Terms, Related Terms, and a list of Used For terms, mirroring LCSH terminology. Users can then select terms and add them to their search. These features can be generally helpful, but there are moments when advanced users and researchers might be frustrated with the database’s controlled vocabulary. It is unclear whether the thesaurus entries are authored. At the end of one scope note, there are initials in brackets, but upon investigating information about the thesaurus, including using the EBSCOhost Help option for this database, there was no statement that confirmed authorship of entries.

I did a test search for the term Queer. I chose this term for a couple of reasons: it is not included in the database’s title initialism “LGBT;” though it very often is included in current parlance and research; and it continues to become more important to academics who wish to give more depth to the terms gay and lesbian, to explain theoretical and critical stances, or to expand the possibilities of identity and representation. The search returned the following results:

QUEER bashing Use VIOLENCE against LGBT people;
 QUEER cinema Use LGBT motion pictures;
 QUEER culture Use GAY culture;
 QUEER film festivals Use LGBT film festivals;
 QUEER people Use LGBT people;
 QUEER publishing Use LGBT publishing;
 QUEER skinheads Use GAY skinheads.

The first “Use For” is not surprising, since “queer bashing” is a very charged term with a pejorative connotation. However, the rest could all arguably be legitimate subject terms, as they carry with them very specific connotations used by community members. There is a difference, not always clear, but a difference nonetheless, between “queer cinema” and “LGBT motion pictures,” just as there is a huge difference between “queer culture” and “gay culture,” especially since “gay” does not always include “lesbian” or “bisexual” or “transgender,” though “queer” can.



LGBT Life with Full Text Review Scores Composite: ★★ ★ 7/8

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

Content: ★★★★★ 1/2

The database provides access to some publications available in other databases, both subscription and Open Access. However, the percentage of duplicates is low, compared with the number of historically and critically important publications that this database does cover. The scope, quantity, and quality of these publications, not available elsewhere in such a concentration, make this a standout feature.

User Interface/Searchability: ★★★★★

LGBT Life with Full Text uses the familiar EBSCO user interface, with many relevant limiters. Users familiar with this interface will have no problems, and new users will become adept in no time. The product's thesaurus contains over 7,500 terms, and many of these terms will be helpful to researchers. Unfortunately, since some of the subject terms used within this field of study can be contentious, scholars familiar with certain nuances may be frustrated by the way certain terms are used. The database allows licensees to offer online chat reference, through a direct link or a chat plug-in.

Pricing: ★★★

At \$6,510 for a one-year subscription for an academic institution with 17,000 students, the price could be considered steep, especially as libraries are looking much more closely at their bottom lines. One drawback is that the product contains publications available in other sources, so institutions that purchase this product might be buying things twice. Because this is currently the best database of its kind, it is not surprising that the price is as high as it is. Those interested in this resource are a captive audience; there really is no comparable alternative.

Contract options: ★★★★★

EBSCO is liberal in its provisions, allowing for multiple authenticated institutional users, both on site and remote, as well as interlibrary loan (within acceptable guidelines).

There is, however, an entry for Queer Theory, with the following scope note:

"Here are entered works on the variety of philosophical or critical modes of thought corresponding to or specifically taking into account gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transsexual viewpoints. Works on the academic examination of such theories in application are entered under "Gay & lesbian studies."¹

This is still problematic, as many things are considered queer that might go beyond "gay and lesbian studies." And queer is very often an academic examination of ideas; this scope note could be confusing

for scholars used to a more nuanced definition, or to lay users who are still trying to get a handle on terminology.

The database offers the following Related Terms for Queer Theory:

DECONSTRUCTION;
FEMINISM;
GAY & lesbian studies;
GENDER identity;
GENDER studies;
HETERONORMATIVITY;
HOMOSEXUALITY theory;
LESBIAN feminist theory;
LGBT people;
LGBT people – Identity;
POSTSTRUCTURALISM;
PSYCHOANALYSIS;
SOCIAL constructionism.

Many of these terms do inform, overlap with, and exist within queer theory, but they are not direct corollaries.

An interesting omission is the term CISGENDER, though this term pops up in search results. Cisgender relates to folks whose gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth. It is possible that the term could be too new, and perhaps newer iterations of the thesaurus will include it.

Contact Information

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The history of collecting and representing LGBT and queer sources and ephemera is, not surprisingly, fraught with politics, marked by gaps, and influenced by controversy. There are many libraries, archives, and cultural centers, small and large, corporate and individual, which collect LGBT materials. Some of these materials are online; most are in boxes available only to researchers on site. LGBT Life with Full Text helps to bring to light these materials to a broader audience. While a large proportion of materials is scholarly in nature, this database should be used by anyone interested in the richness and diversity of LGBT history. It could prove to be difficult when deciding whether to purchase this product, though the benefits undoubtedly outweigh some of the databases weaker aspects, (such as sometimes confusing subject terms, duplication of materials found in other databases, the lack of full text to everything). This product will be at home in academic libraries, as well as public libraries, and archives or other centers of research devoted to LGBT history.

Contract Provisions

The subscription fee provides onsite and remote access to an unlimited number of authenticated users. According to the EBSCO representative I spoke with, users are “employees, students, registered patrons, walk-in patrons, or other persons affiliated” with the institution licensed to use access the product.² Interlibrary Loan is permitted, provided there are no copyright restrictions or prohibitions. For copyright information, users are directed to consult individual article records.

Authentication

EBSCO allows access of the database to remote users by providing IP addresses to the licensee, under the provision that the licensee institution can guarantee security measures that prevent the use of unauthorized persons, parties, or institutions.

Author’s References

1. “Queer Theory.” LGBT Life with Full Text, EBSCOhost (accessed May 2, 2012), <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/thesaurus?sid=575940d1-48d2-443e-86c0-b9716e759fcc%40sessionmgr14&vid=20&hid=11>.
2. Amy Levine, e-mail message to author, April 25, 2012.

About the Author

Matthew Harrick is Outreach and Instruction Librarian at Brooklyn College – CUNY, in Brooklyn, New York. He provides support reference and instructional support to the Education, Earth & Environmental Sciences, and Environmental Studies departments, as well as to Brooklyn College’s Early College High School programs. He is currently working on creating queer/safer spaces at the library, as well as developing a relationship with the new LGBTQ Studies Minor on campus. ■



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