

# Information and intersectionality in the digital millennium

Mondo Vaden

*Mondo Connections, LLC and The Library of Intersectionality, Sacramento, CA, USA*

*E-mail: Mondococonnections1618@gmail.com*

This paper details the importance of virtual and non-traditional information sharing mediums to create better information access outcomes for people experiencing multiple forms of oppression simultaneously. Non-mainstream media platforms and formats like Tumblr and zines, are a valuable potential contribution to the discourse on coloniality, decoloniality, and how resistant knowledges manifest according to the needs of the people who create them. The information sciences are limited as a result of the majority white, abled nature of the field, and Tumblr and zines create a forum for out of the box thinking and re-research that creatively and thoughtfully sidesteps censorship. The paper is via a personal lens of lived experience and aims to uplift the recognition and validation of non-standard methods of information sharing used by BIPOC, Queer, and disabled communities. It underscores how these methods serve as vital avenues for community building, education, and the preservation and dissemination of marginalized voices and experiences. The paper emphasizes the necessity of acknowledging and integrating these unconventional sources into the broader landscape of information sciences, arguing for their value and legitimacy alongside traditional information repositories.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Tumblr, zines, virtual communities, nontraditional media, community building

## 1. Introduction

Community is something many of us seek, and many of us are fortunate to find. The beauty of community is that it's simultaneously a collective and individual experience. When individuals choose to co-create a community together, they are immediately connected with more resources and information relevant to being in that community. Information sharing within a community is a deeply important way people can pursue self improvement. This results in positive ripple effects from the individual all the way up to the systemic level. According to Fisher and Bishop (2022), information communities are usually based on some combination of common interests, shared desires to accomplish goals, and shared beliefs, lived experiences, or ways of being.

In the present day, community as a concept has been used to inform methodologies in information sciences as a way to determine focuses of research and providing resources (Fisher & Bishop, 2022). This bond of community also naturally facilitates the formation of resistant knowledge forms, what Fuh (2022) refers to as "epistemic disobedience". When people in marginalized groups come together and share their experiences and needs, whether implicitly or explicitly, progress and self advocacy happens, in spite of the dominant structures! The community can determine their

own ways of definition, their own needs around support and their own ideals of what thriving looks like. This communication results in deeper potential for social change, especially for people systematically marginalized in society. These people get to determine what information their community needs outside of what Eurocentric academia would say is needed (Yeon et al., 2023). People who are marginalized are able to utilize community to push back against the impacts of dominant society and the kyriarchy.

Multi-marginalized people are impacted by the way intersectionality manifests in the kyriarchy. Kyriarchy and intersectionality are irrevocably linked (Osborne, 2015). Intersectionality is used to understand the ways marginalized identity in different aspects overlap and result in impacts in a system that caters towards the privileged, while kyriarchy puts name to the systems created in order to oppress those identities (Crenshaw, 1991). Kyriarchy is the system that creates structures of privilege and marginalization in our society while intersectionality is the way overlapping marginalized identities are impacted by these structures (Fiorenza, 1992). They both require the understanding of people as whole people, and of the fact that despite wanting equity for all, that's not currently possible due to the way our society has been structured by colonization and how that impacts people on the micro and macro level.

So what can we do to challenge this impact of colonization in the information sciences? How can we apply the knowledge of CRT concepts and resistant knowledge forms to challenge the status quo as it currently stands?

Speaking from my perspective as a Black, Queer, Disabled librarian in a majority white, cisheteronormative, ableist field, with a lifetime of personally experiencing the impact of intersectionality in my life, I've observed how information has a way of surviving and being shared in unexpected places. As long as I've been working in information sciences, I continue to learn that there are countless ways that information travels, whether it's word of mouth, through zines, through letters, through blogs or other means. This chapter explores the manifestation of decolonial ways of information sharing that have positively impacted the lives of people like me, who experience multiple forms of marginalization at once (Brah, 2022). We can utilize re-search to assist the information communities of multi-marginalized people, as informed by the information already available, yet perhaps not previously considered (Smith, 2021).

### *1.1. Analysis and methodology*

This chapter aims to address and consider the information contributions of people at the intersection of the BIPOC, Queer, and disabled communities, through my own lens of lived experience. We should not underestimate even small ways of information sharing and so we will look at two methods of unlikely information sources utilized by people at this intersection: Tumblr and zines. I am here to argue that these mediums, or other non-standard alternatives, should also be considered when seeking information to benefit and support marginalized communities. These

78 alternative information sources have led to the community co-creation of accessible  
79 and inclusive knowledge.

80 The counter-storytelling that these information sources facilitate challenges tra-  
81 ditional information repositories and forces them to grow beyond the information  
82 needs of the privileged majority (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). I intend for this chapter  
83 to be for the information community of library workers and people in the information  
84 sciences who wish to disrupt the present system that picks and chooses which person  
85 of privilege is able to have their voice heard. I have personally spent extensive time  
86 getting information from Tumblr (personal experience from 2010–2018) and zines.  
87 My lived experience inspired me to apply a deeper lens as to what re-search can look  
88 like when it comes to multi-marginalized community experiences with information.  
89 I push back against conventional academic research paradigms because, as an in-  
90 dividual living an intersectional existence within multiple marginalized identities,  
91 voices like mine in academia are a privileged few. I've had to diverge from many of  
92 the standard pathways of information science as a result of the impact of my lived  
93 intersectionality and the hostility I experienced as a result of navigating the kyriarchy  
94 in the field. I learned that my lived experience has shown me that the information  
95 needs of people like me are overlooked. As an individual who inadvertently ends up  
96 subverting conventional scholarly boundaries by speaking on my Black, Deaf, and  
97 transgender presence and experiences in information sciences, this analysis itself is a  
98 vulnerable re-search from the inside out.

## 99 **2. The value of virtual communities**

100 For many people with disabilities, the internet is where we go to connect. We  
101 do not have the same range of options as an abled person. Barriers to socialization  
102 can range from, having a rough body-mind day, to lack of travel resources, or lack  
103 of masks in a pandemic. The internet and virtual spaces allow us to find virtual  
104 communities despite our isolation, or barriers to access in real life (IRL). These  
105 virtual spaces and communities are especially relevant to people who are living  
106 queer, disabled, BIPOC experience simultaneously because many information sources  
107 available in the mainstream don't consider intersectionality (Fredrick, 2016). There  
108 may be a resource for queer bodies, but it may not accommodate a disabled queer  
109 body. What about navigating disability while queer and Black? There may be a  
110 resource for someone living BIPOC experience, but can that person find materials  
111 that supportively address their queer experience in a racially marginalized body?  
112 There may be a resource for a Black community members, but if that resource isn't  
113 captioned, or made accessible to Black Disabled people, it will miss that community  
114 entirely, even if the resource would genuinely be helpful. Adding this intersectional  
115 lens to how we address information access and resources would allow us to shape the  
116 information sciences more thoughtfully and with inclusion in mind to challenge the  
117 dominant culture, as suggested by Collins (2019).

118 Virtual communities subvert all of that by allowing us to curate our own internet

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119 experiences and the related information discovery. In the ongoing pandemic virtual  
120 communities have been a necessary support for those of us navigating disability,  
121 like Garden (2024). As a result, those in information sciences need to be aware that  
122 we are not dismissing the various virtual spaces that many living queer, disabled,  
123 BIPOC existences find affirming of their lived experiences and spaces that provide an  
124 alternative way to document and share information within community contexts (Bury,  
125 2019).

126 To pursue this means to acknowledge that information access needs vary generation  
127 to generation as well. There is much that can be learned from Tumblr and zines  
128 that inform the next generation of technological resources, especially those that  
129 focus on equity goals, although findability may vary (*online resources on Tumblr*,  
130 n.d.). Currently, Gen Z has become more active on Tumblr in recent years. As  
131 assessed by Metraux (2022), Tumblr is a source for a lot of media discourse around  
132 identity and representation (Pow, 2021). This work around social justice could help  
133 us find solutions to close the representation gaps in literature and media. There are  
134 additional ways to subvert the dominant information systems shared via Tumblr as  
135 well (Anthrocentric, 2015).

### 136 *2.1. The conflicts between social media censorship and counter storytelling*

137 When it comes to counterstorytelling, it's clear that on the more mainstream social  
138 medias like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, there is a certain degree of censorship  
139 of people of the global majority (Botella, 2019). Even as I type, there is a genocide  
140 happening in Palestine, Congo, and Sudan, and it is a constant struggle to make  
141 sure that enough traction is gained against social media algorithms that are biased  
142 against people experiencing racial oppression (Noble, 2018). There is a consistent  
143 amount of what is known as "shadowbanning", an algorithmic suppression by social  
144 media platforms based on what a social media platform determines to be unfavorable  
145 (Delmonaco et al., 2024).

146 Naturally shadowbanning impacts marginalized people the most. For example, my  
147 own experience of reporting multiple blatantly racist pages on Instagram that have  
148 racial slurs and white supremacist ideology, and the pages will not be taken down by  
149 the platform. Yet, on that same platform, I simultaneously deal with suppression of a  
150 page I created to focus on building an accessible BlackQueer resource and event page  
151 for local community building and sharing of Black Queer Joy. The reasoning . . . the  
152 algorithm accused me of "automation", even though I personally made and posted  
153 everything on that page; while simultaneously virulently racist pages are allowed  
154 to remain up. This suppression has led to many Black people and other racially  
155 marginalized groups to resort to shortening terms like "white" to "yt", "wheat",  
156 emojis, or other code so that algorithms don't flag their pages for talking negatively  
157 about white supremacy. In essence, anything posted by a racially marginalized person  
158 on the topic of whiteness and white supremacy can be flagged as hate speech without  
159 this internet speak change (Joseph, 2019).

160 Additionally, this results in the need to change terms like Palestine to “pals” or  
161 an watermelon emoji, or “racism” to “racizm”, “g3n0c1de” instead of “genocide”,  
162 and other such edits to avoid censorship of topics that matter to those in marginalized  
163 groups. Queer people of color have to consider what they post visually, especially if  
164 they are living in a fat or disabled body simultaneously (Fitzsimmons, 2021). This  
165 level of censorship of social justice issues and related disparities of treatment by  
166 the algorithm does not seem to happen to the same degree on Tumblr, in part, due  
167 to internet speak. Internet speak here is being used to refer to the way language  
168 transforms due to the varied nature of internet communication (Eller, 2005). Addi-  
169 tional censorship includes suppression of anything determined to be sexual content in  
170 2018, as well as suppression of mental health and other topics deemed as “sensitive”  
171 (Nguyen, 2022).

### 172 **3. Tumblr: Bringing us together, one post at a time**

173 Tumblr is a social networking website known mainly as a microblogging platform  
174 where people can share images, commentary, writing, art, and so much more. It’s  
175 also where many queer people locate community, and people find support with  
176 their experiences with disability. In a time when much of mainstream media was  
177 predominantly yt, thin, abled or cis heterosexual, Tumblr was showcasing people of  
178 all walks of life, in all bodies, of all shades. Many people were able to self disclose  
179 their marginalized identities that they may not have disclosed elsewhere (Bianchi et  
180 al., 2022). Tumblr was additionally where I was first exposed to the concept of fat  
181 positivity and its descendant movement of body positivity which allowed me to learn  
182 how to embrace my BlackQueerDisabled body in a society that predetermined those  
183 intersectional identities aren’t favorable (Osborn, 2023).

184 For those of us living within identity intersections who are required to navigate  
185 information suppression, we devour the content found on Tumblr. We learn more than  
186 many consider possible by building community via this blogging site. As someone  
187 who has become a librarian, I reflect back on the time period being on the website  
188 between 2011–2016, and marvel. It was the first time I had seen accessible sex  
189 education (*hell, yeah* Scarleteen, n.d.), the first time I was able to socialize as a  
190 disabled person, and I was exposed to social justice concepts around race like cultural  
191 appropriation and racebending. It was also the first time I had been able to meet other  
192 queer people with marginalized experiences. I was able to share and learn from people  
193 who I would not have met if I had continued to focus on navigating an ableist world  
194 IRL instead of choosing to seek virtual communities. It made the internet a place that  
195 fueled my love of information sciences because Tumblr gave me a deeper look at  
196 humanity, as well as initiating my experiences with coding a website.

197 Tumblr’s climate of freedom and anonymity allowed many people to seek infor-  
198 mation they aren’t able to get from their peers IRL. The site ended up challenging  
199 hegemonic narratives by the way it enabled people to experiment with being who

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200 they couldn't or weren't allowed to be in their day to day (Cho, 2022). As I got older,  
201 I realized I wasn't the only one who was positively impacted by the sexual education  
202 resources from Tumblr (Roderick, 2015). Tumblr was much more accessible for me  
203 than my experience of taking a sex ed class at Catholic school without accommoda-  
204 tions. These experiences gave me food for thought regarding how Tumblr can inform  
205 a redefining of information dissemination. If information and support from peers  
206 of similar lived experience is considered valid in a world where multi-marginalized  
207 opinions are often under considered, it creates more options that the majority would  
208 never have needed to consider as a result of their privilege.

209 Storytelling is one of the many ways communities grow on Tumblr. Sharing expe-  
210 riences and having others respond or share posts on their pages is its own affirmation.  
211 Many posts and stories originated on Tumblr end up migrating via screenshots onto  
212 other platforms, creating even greater dispersal of information, even if the information  
213 is disseminated in the diminutive form of a meme. This information sharing creates  
214 community organically, as demonstrated by the growth of fandom culture (Kohnen,  
215 2018).

### 216 *3.1. Lessons from Tumblr: Cultural appropriation and racebending*

217 Tumblr allowed me to connect with what Calhoun (2020) defined as "Black Tum-  
218 blr" and to engage in collective organizing and information sharing with other Black  
219 people with additional marginalizations. When it comes to social justice topics around  
220 race, I originally found out about cultural appropriation and racebending from Tumblr.  
221 This knowledge gave me an immediate awareness about the media I consumed. It  
222 made me become a better researcher because I questioned more in my IRL world than  
223 I may have otherwise around politics, around who gets to access information.

224 Cultural appropriation is the process of those who oppressed a culture benefiting  
225 from cherry picked aspects of that culture, whether it be socially, financially, or  
226 otherwise, in a way that is denied to the oppressed culture. Racebending is the  
227 reimagining of traditionally white characters as a marginalized race. This is something  
228 that is beginning to be more documented, with people of marginalized groups speaking  
229 out about people treating their cultural markers and identities as cosplay (Nilsson,  
230 2022).

231 I found out about these issues through people on Tumblr spreading awareness,  
232 which led to me connecting with information groups on Facebook, specifically one  
233 focused on cultural appropriation. There are many groups that have that focus, but  
234 in this particular Facebook group, which I found via a similar group with a Tumblr  
235 page, they draw a hard line around understanding gatekeeping of information when it  
236 comes to spirituality. Why? Because they do not feel that it makes sense to culturally  
237 appropriate and be able to benefit from that ethically.

238 For instance, a group named Witches Without Cultural Appropriation has some  
239 documentation on closed practices, but focuses on sharing open practices, intended to  
240 help people seeking their ancestral practices as a starting place. The administrator of

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241 the group, Sayas-Díaz de Escalona (2020) has actively worked to curate a safe and  
242 well moderated space for learning. People are able to seek and share information about  
243 their practices and be able to find support in solo spiritual practices. Many groups on  
244 Facebook do not have this same stance, which mimics Tumblr behavior. This group is  
245 not explicitly acting as a “virtual library”, namely, a collection of digital resources, but  
246 the information provided from the community sharing on reconnecting with ancestral  
247 practices is invaluable. It’s given me a lot of food for thought in regards to how people  
248 subvert traditional academia methodologies in order to express otherwise suppressed  
249 experiences, and the role of social media in that process.

250 This comes into play as well with Women of Color Feminist Tumblr, which  
251 collects and distributes information that supports education via feminist studies  
252 from an intersectional lens as originally discussed by Crenshaw (1991). Women of  
253 Color Feminist Tumblr was analyzed by Alzate (2020) as a source that suggests the  
254 potential for Tumblr (and potentially other social media), as a pedagogical forum that  
255 utilizes counterstorytelling, and other methodologies to disseminate knowledge. The  
256 community that has formed around this Tumblr to challenge colonial mindsets around  
257 feminism that centers yt women and ignores the fact that women who live racialized  
258 experience navigate that as well as womanhood (*Women of Color, in Solidarity*, 2018).  
259 The resistant knowledges created as a result of the work that went into this Tumblr  
260 cannot be overstated in potential significance. This and more are reason enough to  
261 consider Tumblr a valuable source of knowledge that has the ability to be a tool,  
262 a community forum, and a resource center simultaneously, ultimately challenging  
263 hegemonic knowledge spaces as they currently operate.

#### 264 **4. Zines: The information in the hands of the people**

265 The impact of virtual communities also informs the creation of zines. Zines are  
266 usually independently published work that has a limited run of prints. Format ranges  
267 according to the creator’s creative intellectual choices (*What Is a Zine?*, n.d.). Off the  
268 internet, zines have been utilized by those with intersectional identities to disseminate  
269 information. In a time when many people whose lived experiences do not include  
270 access to traditional means of publishing, zines allow them to share information in  
271 an engaging artistic way, whether for free or for financial sustenance. I feel zines’  
272 contribution to short form media as information sharing cannot be understated. Many  
273 zines have been dispersed by Tumblr communities as well, whether by mail, in person  
274 markets, or virtually.

##### 275 *4.1. Lessons from Zines*

276 The inclusive nature of zines challenges traditional media hierarchies and provides  
277 a voice for marginalized groups simultaneously. Zines allow greater diversity that  
278 subverts the traditional publishing industry by sidestepping it entirely (Bold, 2017).

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279 Zines are able to be disseminated in person or virtually, on a wide variety of platforms.  
280 They create an avenue for marginalized groups to subvert traditional publishing  
281 and put out their own stories, utilizing counter storytelling to release the pressure  
282 caused by daily microaggressions (Trazo & Kim, 2019).

283 One example of this playing out is the creation of the POC Zines Project, a  
284 community-building project that promotes zines by racially marginalized people, as  
285 analyzed by Bold (2017). Zines facilitate creative and social collaboration both online  
286 and offline.

287 Zine librarianship has become its own subfield as well. Zine librarianship focuses  
288 on elevating the voices of marginalized people who have made zines to share in-  
289 formation. Fox et al. (2017) note that zine librarianship as a field is not gatekept,  
290 and “no credentials are required to be a part of the action”. This means that ANY  
291 librarian could potentially develop a zine library relevant to a community (*Code of*  
292 *Ethics*, 2015). Zine librarianship could be a means for librarians to find ways to fill  
293 representation gaps in their collection regarding marginalized groups by finding new  
294 ways to showcase zines as part of the public record. Zines are additionally accessible  
295 to all ages, and can be made virtual, which means the possibilities are endless.

## 296 **5. Practical applications in information sciences**

297 This brings me to extensive questions, not least, around consideration whether  
298 culturally closed practices require “gatekeeping” in information sciences, and the  
299 impact of actions like this that may contribute to marginalized groups gaining more  
300 respect in information. Work focusing on race and decoloniality is already being  
301 navigated in more concrete and practical ways by the creation of special libraries  
302 dedicated to these specialized resources but remain open to all who seek them. One  
303 such example using Tumblr is the LIS Microaggressions Tumblr, which illustrates  
304 multiple real life examples of the microaggressions navigated by those of marginalized  
305 experience in LIS. The people involved in this have also created several successful  
306 and documented zines on the topic, illustrating the magic that can happen when virtual  
307 work is aligned and cohesive with the work being done every day in our field.

308 Tumblr also is ripe for creative pedagogical opportunities because it has a lower  
309 financial barrier of entry for educators. Because Tumblr has archival applications as  
310 well, it has multiple possible uses with relevance to the information sciences (Murillo,  
311 2020).

### 312 *5.1. Limitations and concerns*

313 Christian et al. (2020b) studied the way mainstream social media platforms and their  
314 potential for connection are challenged by the needs of people experiencing multiple  
315 forms of marginalization. There are also concerns in the execution of cataloging and  
316 metadata for things like zines and Tumblr posts. While there are styles of citation



317 determined for Tumblr posts, Tumblr is still not a permanent repository and if someone  
318 chooses to deactivate their page, whatever resources shared would only be able to be  
319 found as a secondary source, from another's Tumblr page or via a meme. This creates  
320 a barrier in regards to academic rigor. Meanwhile, zines still stump many archivists  
321 due to their anti-institutional nature. This additionally comes into play because zines  
322 are often made by and for underrepresented groups who may not have a voice at their  
323 local institutions as studied by Fife (2019).

324 Due to the lack of academic rigor, and the nature of the microblogging format, it  
325 can be difficult to determine an author. Despite Tumblr being a site where many who  
326 have multi-marginalized identities find support, there are still issues around racism  
327 of users and racial bias on the site itself. This means while Tumblr is an inclusive  
328 space, it's not necessarily a utopic space where racial, ableist, queermisic harms  
329 are not present (Noble & Tynes, 2016). People still have to navigate the issues of  
330 the kyriarchy playing out in all circumstances where humans interact, including on  
331 Tumblr (Agarwal & Sureka, 2016).

332 This then creates considerations around ethics of using these sites as academic  
333 research sources, around marginalized identities because there is less oversight around  
334 consent to be included in research (Korn, 2019). Another limitation is the lack of  
335 funding and time and staffing that these resources often have. Women of Color Tumblr  
336 went on hiatus in 2018 as a result of the lack of institutional support and has not been  
337 updated since (*Women of Color, in Solidarity*, 2018).

## 338 5.2. *The future of information sources*

339 Attu and Terras (2017) have done extensive work to figure out how research on  
340 Tumblr had slowly grown since the launch of the popular website in 2007. They  
341 created a classification scheme to study Tumblr as an information source, and to  
342 determine ways people are navigating the website's lack of metadata in social me-  
343 dia research. Despite the fact that popularity of the site fluctuates, many people in  
344 and out of academia are already treating Tumblr as a source of information. Piper  
345 (2016) provides an example of how Tumblr can be used as an archive for sharing the  
346 experiences of those outside of the majority.

347 There is a deep necessity to allow people to tell their own stories, and Tumblr,  
348 zines, and other methodologies easily facilitate this process of developing cultural  
349 wealth (Yosso, 2005). Tumblrs like Women of Color (2017) have already connected  
350 many people with additional Tumblrs on POC experience.

351 Zines allow for a mimicking of this organic information sharing IRL, but many  
352 zines that start offline in paper format end up scanned and shared in many places,  
353 including Tumblr, creating this really beautiful mutual cycle.

354 If people are able to wholeheartedly develop an understanding of intersectionality  
355 as a critical theory, information sciences would immediately have more options in  
356 regards to understanding better ways of cataloging and archiving (Vaden, 2022). This  
357 is something that should be done thoughtfully, because in a majority yt field, there

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358 is unfortunately potential for this work to be co-opted by those who do not need  
359 it, according to Reddy (2023) who studied the utility of how to inform people who  
360 navigate human rights education and the law.

361 Intersectionality as a critical race theory tenet as defined by Crenshaw will not go  
362 away as a means to understand and combat disparity in information services (Grauel,  
363 2022). This is also explored in CRT focused edited work Knowledge Justice (2021),  
364 which has an immense amount of resources from people doing the work towards  
365 decolonizing the information sciences. This book was made open access because the  
366 information included is invaluable to those in the information sciences who want to  
367 understand CRT in regards to their library work, and want to change and expand the  
368 field in ways that matter to those who experience barriers to information access as a  
369 result of marginalized lived experiences. This access was made possible via funding,  
370 that many marginalized writers and voices usually do not have access to. I envision  
371 the expansion of zine programs to help people gain entry to decolonial methods of  
372 information sharing, in and out of institutions.

## 373 **6. Conclusion**

374 Thanks to work in the present day, I know that we are not alone in this work  
375 to support the co-creation of accessible and inclusive knowledge and information  
376 resources (Knowledge Justice, 2021). There's an entire community of BIPOC, Queer,  
377 and/or Disabled people in the information sciences. Imagine if we were able to tip the  
378 scales regarding information access! Imagine if we were able to unmask our identities  
379 like many of us do on Tumblr, in ways that would make Franz Fanon (1952) proud  
380 via the application of intersectionality, and a deeper understanding of the fact that  
381 decolonizing the information science fields would give us a more comprehensive look  
382 at how we support the marginalized communities we serve.

383 The future of information and historical records is going to continue to find new  
384 homes as the digital age continues. It would be wonderful to consider these unlikely  
385 sources, and similar, to have as much potential value as any academic repository. It is  
386 more than possible to carve out space in the information sciences to take Tumblr and  
387 zines seriously. When it comes to new sources of resistant knowledges, there's more  
388 on the internet in these social medias than you may think.

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