I'll Drown My Book:

Visibility, Gender, and Classification in The University of Arizona Poetry Center Library

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At the 2015 Association of Writers and Writing Programs conference in Minneapolis, writers were asked to create and be photographed with messages for "straight white male publishing." Many of the responses ran to messages like "Listen," "Don't assume you are at the center," and "Diversity is not publishing the one story. It's publishing multiple stories from people of diverse backgrounds" (Fitzgerald, 2015). Others were angrier: "Take a vacation (a long one)," "Grow up," "We owe you nothing," and "Sit down and let us abolish you" (Fitzgerald, 2015). The comments on this article, which appeared on the website *Buzzfeed*, tended to be negative, defensive, and dismissive, with commenters characterizing the pictured writers as hysterical, entitled, and lazy; commenters appeared to believe that women dominated literary publishing, with several citing a Publisher's Weekly article that found that women make up 70% of the workforce in the publishing industry (Deahl, 2010; Fitzgerald, 2015). (This is, as it turns out, a somewhat irrelevant statistic, since the writers in question are not seeking jobs in publishing but publication itself--an area, as we shall see, where female voices are still significantly underrepresented.) The commenters showed a tendency to ascribe the angriest sentiments to all the pictured writers, and (without being aware of the fact) to advocate for diversity in a way that actually echoed some of the messages from the writers shown. Most interestingly, as of May 1, 2015, a fair share of the tags readers assigned to this particular article were positive (82 responders attached a "heart" or a "win" tag to the article, while 61 responders tagged the article with "fail"), but these proportions were not represented in the comment section, which consisted primarily of negative reactions (Fitzgerald, 2015). This particular article, along with its readership, is emblematic of the situation of women in the contemporary literary publishing landscape.

Women's voices are underrepresented and undervalued, as I will show; they are

sometimes publicly mocked and effectively silenced, as we see in this comment section;

and the result is a chilling (and sometimes silencing) effect on women in literature. This

chilling effect extends across literary genres. In order to combat the erasure of women's

voices, I have undertaken a "visibility" project in my home institution, The University of

Arizona Poetry Center Library. Through this project, I seek to highlight and amplify the

voices of female poets in the holdings of a single library by enhancing subject analysis in

cataloging practices and creating a shelf designation for anthologies that focus on

women's writing.

  The University of Arizona Poetry Center is a special-collections library dedicated

to contemporary poetry written in or translated into English. The collection includes over

$46,000$ books, most of which are available to the public in an open-stack, browsable

format. The majority of the main collection is shelved alpha by author to aid browsing.

However, since anthologies (which have many authors) cannot be shelved in this way,

the library's Anthologies section is shelved by geographic location or by subject. Some of

the sub-sections in the Anthologies section reflect issues of representation in the

publishing landscape, highlighting groups of writers who have historically been

underrepresented in the literary canon: these include shelf designations for anthologies of

African American, Native American, and LGBTIQ writing, among others. However,

until now there has been no shelf designation for writing by women, who are also

underrepresented in terms of the literary canon. The library's holdings include

approximately 180 anthologies that focus exclusively on poetry by women; these

anthologies are currently scattered throughout the Anthologies section, generally by

geographic distribution (there are many women's anthologies in the United States and International sections, for example).

The relatively large number of anthologies of poetry written by women released over the last half-century (the temporal focus of the Poetry Center's holdings) speaks to the need to amplify and highlight women's writing; these anthologies are made in an effort to push back against the erasure of women's writing created by a publishing industry that, in some ways, still perpetuates institutional sexism. This erasure is not widely discussed in the scholarly literature (certainly not to the extent that gender gaps are discussed in scientific and medical publishing), but is readily apparent from empirical data. No woman has ever won a Pulitzer or National Book Award for poetry twice; less than 30% of the winners of these prizes have been female since their inceptions in 1922 and 1950, respectively, though both prize committees have honored women more frequently than men in the very recent period 2010-2014 (National Book Foundation, 2013; The Pulitzer Prizes, 2014). Meanwhile, VIDA: Women in Literary Arts, a volunteer organization, has documented the appearances of women in the pages of prestigious journals, anthologies, and reviewing publications since 2010, finding that some major publications (such as the *New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Times Literary Supplement*) favor male authors and male book reviewers by margins of up to 75% (Marvin & Belieu, 2015); furthermore, both major for-profit publishing houses and independent literary presses tend to favor titles by male authors by similar margins (Franklin, 2011). While many prestigious literary publications are beginning to make strides toward gender parity, all but one or two still favored male authors over female authors in every year the VIDA count has occurred (Marvin & Belieu, 2015). These

numbers, of course, are not the entire story; VIDA's stated goal is consciousness-raising, not bean-counting (Marvin & Belieu, 2015), and there are many societal factors that may account for these numbers. John Freeman, the editor of *GRANTA* magazine, observes that even though he and his staff solicit male and female authors evenly, the final count of pieces accepted for publication still favors men; he asks the troubling question, "how gendered are our notions of storytelling?" (Page, 2011).

These apparent gender biases in literary publishing extend, in a broad sense, across literary genre, though Oggins (2014) found some differences in women's underrepresentation by genre in her study of *Best American* anthologies (notably, women in her study were least likely to be underrepresented in short fiction, but the underrepresentation problem persisted in poetry; we should also note that her study is a necessarily focused on a small subsection of the literary publishing landscape overall). Given the data from Oggins and VIDA, it seems reasonable to conclude that female poets are less likely than their male peers to have work selected for publication and less likely to win prestigious literary prizes. This results in an erasure of women's voices in poetry, and it is this erasure that I hope to combat by highlighting women's writing in UAPC's Anthologies section.

This project will accomplish two main goals: to make anthologies of women's poetry more visible on a physical level through a new shelf classification, and more visible in the library's OPAC through enhanced cataloging practices resulting from more rigorous subject analysis.

Shelf Designation

The creation of a new shelf designation for women's anthologies will involve several stages. First, I will need to decide on parameters for selection for the new section; ideally, these parameters should be reflected in the new section's name. I tentatively plan to include the words "gender," "women's," "queer," and "feminist" in the nomenclature and rubric for the new section; I also plan to consult with experts in the field of Library and Information Sciences and Gender and Women's Studies, as well as with library users, in order to name the section as inclusively and precisely as possible. My current feeling is that all four of the terms listed above may be necessary in order to include poets who are biologically female; whose gender expression is female; and who adopt radical, queer, and feminist stances. The exclusion of any one of these terms might result in a reinforcement of oppressive, regressive, and "fixed" gender binaries (Billey, Drabinski, & Roberto, 2014) or in the privileging of one way of knowing over another. For example, it may not be appropriate to call this section "feminist" only, as some of the female-centric works in UAPC's Anthologies section do not explicitly self-identify with the feminist movement or concern themselves with feminist politics; it would, however, be equally inappropriate to eliminate feminist, radical, and queer political writing from the section, since these political movements have had profound implications for women's poetry as in other art forms. In fact, it is highly probable that women's anthologies, like "women's collections...owe their number, size and vigor to feminism, with its dual commitments to activism and scholarship on behalf of women" (Hildenbrand, 1986, p. 1). The evolution of queer theory, with its emphasis on the value of multiple ways of knowing, is also deeply important to our understanding of women's voices. It is, of course, impossible to

create fully "queer" shelf designations, as queer theory by its nature "resist[s]...social

practices that freeze identities in time and universalize them" (Billey, Drabinski, &

Roberto, 2014, p. 414); the creation of a shelf classification is a *fixing* action, and yet

such fixing is necessary if resources are to be discoverable. By utilizing inclusive

terminology, it is my hope to encompass as much ambiguity and fluidity within the new

anthology section as possible, while keeping sight of the project's original goal: to

amplify and highlight the voices of a group of writers who are underrepresented in the

literary canon.

Second, I will need to select books for the new section based on the parameters

that emerge in the naming process; to undertake physical shelf preparations designating

each book for the new section; to create catalog notes for each item directing users to the

new section; and to create shelf space for the new section and reshelve books there. I

anticipate that this portion of the project will be a relatively quick process, especially if I

am able to set up clear parameters for selection in the research phase.

Subject Analysis

As part of the creation of the new Anthologies section, I also plan to perform

item-level subject analysis, expanding the use of the MARC 650 field in my personal

cataloging practice. I plan to examine existing bibliographic records and to use the 650 to

add topical subject terms where appropriate, drawing from existing subject heading

systems such as LCSH or FAST. I would also be open to the creation of a list of subject

headings specific to UAPC, if the items in the collection appear to require it, in the

tradition of special libraries like the Kinsey Institute Library (Zhou, 2003) and in the

spirit of feminist disruption, interrogation, and interruption (Olson, 1998).

This part of the project will enhance visibility for poetry written by women in the OPAC; complete, accurate, thorough bibliographic records are an essential component of a given resource's discoverability (Carlyle, Ranger, & Summerlin, 2008). In addition, expanded use of the 650 will allow the OPAC (which, after all, is a *web* resource) to function as a net or web, connecting multiple resources through their subject headings in multiple and non-hierarchical ways. This view of cataloging is strongly influenced by Olson's (2007) influential feminist critique of subject construction, which encouraged information professionals to think of classification in terms of webs and relationships, in addition to the linear, Aristotelian, hierarchical logic of traditional classification schemes. Additionally, an expanded use of the 650 field seems to me to be a method of embracing the fluidities and ambiguities of gender (Drabinski, 2009) by allowing for a multiplicity of subject access points (since the 650 is a repeatable field). Finally, expanded use of the 650 (and revision of topical terms where appropriate) strikes me as an efficient way to "correct" the record where necessary in the continuing effort to combat the "host of untenable--indeed, obsolete and arrogant--assumptions with respect to...women" and other marginalized groups within existing subject heading lists such as LCSH (Berman, 1971, pp. ix-x)--this in the understanding that "correction" is not assumed to be permanent, but occurs in response to changing cultural contexts and understandings, and hopefully in dialogue and collaboration with users (Drabinski, 2013).

Plan of Work

This project will occur in phases over the next few months. I plan to accomplish the remainder of my research, including the solicitation of input from library users, library staff, and campus experts, in the late spring and early summer of 2015. Physical

shelf preparations, catalog notations, and subject analysis will take place in stages in the summer and fall of 2015; this process will be documented and shared on social media in an effort to engage the community and raise community awareness of the nuances of information organization. At the conclusion of the project, UAPC staff plan to display samples from the new anthology section in a library exhibit tentatively titled "Selections from the Permanent Collection: The Poetics and Politics of Gender, Women's, Queer, and Feminist Writing" and slated to open in late November, 2015. For a detailed Plan of Work, along with a draft user survey for use in the initial phases of my two-part project, see appendices.

Risks and Desired Results

This is an ambitious project, and in some ways it is a risky one. There is, for example, a risk that some poets may object to the use of their gender as a discovery point (Olson & Schlegl, 2001; Billey, Drabinski, & Roberto, 2014); writers may feel that gender is irrelevant to their writing and object to gender-based classifications. This particular risk is, I think, minimal in this particular situation, since the anthologies I propose to re-classify all use gender as a focal point. In addition, UAPC is fortunate to operate in a small literary niche, where personal conversations with authors are possible and desirable, and where author concerns can easily be taken into account on an individual basis.

In the creation of an anthology section designed to highlight women's poetry, we may also run the risk of appearing to "essentialize" female authorship and experience. This is a critique that has often been leveled at the feminist movement, especially in the context of tensions over racial identity and issues related to intersectionality. This is, I

believe, the major reason for care in the framing and naming of the new section. My consultations with experts in the field over the summer will, I hope, help me to navigate these concerns, and to frame the new section (and to outline parameters for item selection) in a way that is as inclusive, respectful, and sensitive as possible.

In the end, I hope that by creating a classification for anthologies of poetry written by women, I will also create a "'rhetorical space...where topics can be taken seriously as legitimate subjects for open discussion" (Olson, 1998, p. 233). I would like to see poetry written by women taken seriously as such a "legitimate subject." I would like to see the underrepresentation of women in literary publishing acknowledged as a problem by writers of all gender expressions, viewed as a loss to readers everywhere, and its correction elevated to a top priority for editors and publishers. There are, of course, multiple ways to accomplish this correction; VIDA, along with other arts organizations, is doing important work in this area, as we have seen. This project constitutes a small (but, I believe, a useful and a necessary) part of the ongoing fight against the marginalization and erasure of women's voices in literary publishing. I cannot travel to New York and personally appeal to the editors of our major literary publications; what I can do is to create intellectual and physical spaces for dialogue (with users, staff, and authors) in my home institution, to highlight women's work and enhance its discoverability in that institution, to make the classification process transparent, and to engage poetry readers in a serious interrogation of the way we evaluate great literature.

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Appendix A

Plan of Work

Poetry Center Anthologies: Gender, Women's, Queer, and Feminist Studies

Problem Statement
The literary output of female, female-identified, and feminist writers tends to be undervalued and underrepresented at the highest levels of literary achievement. This problem results in a "chilling" effect for aspiring female writers, who do not see themselves represented in these high-level positions; it negatively impacts the aesthetic and political diversity of the culture's literary output; and it helps to reinforce sexist cultural biases.

Project Goals
- To combat the erasure of female, female-identified, and feminist writers' literary output on a local level by increasing visibility for these writers in The University of Arizona Poetry Center (hereafter referred to as "UAPC").
- To accomplish this heightened visibility for female voices through the creation of an anthology section focusing on these authors.
- To further the long-term goal of increased appreciation for women's writing (and women's ways of knowing) in the literary landscape.

Rationales
- Classification systems create "'rhetorical spaces'…where topics can be taken seriously as legitimate subjects for open discussion" (Olson, 1998, p. 233).
- Poetry Center patrons tend to discover materials through shelf organization primarily, and secondarily by consulting the OPAC.
- The Poetry Center's Anthologies section is an important access point for new users and for users who wish to explore sets of poems organized by particular themes.

Assumptions
- The literary output of female writers is equal in quality to writing produced by men.
- Poetry Center patrons are interested in work by female authors.
- An Anthology section devoted to these writers would increase discoverability for these authors in the collection overall.

Resources
- Staff: Sarah Kortemeier, Library Specialist (project lead); Wendy Burk, Poetry Center Librarian (supervisory support); Julie Swarstad Johnson, Library Assistant (logistical support)

- Approximately 180 anthologies featuring writing exclusively by female, female-identified, and feminist poets
- Book processing supplies
- Staff access to cataloging software; in-house expertise in cataloging and subject analysis

Timeline
May 2015
- Interview campus experts in LIS/Gender and Women's Studies (Jamie Lee, Susan Stryker?) for input on issues of nomenclature, intersectionality, and representation (Kortemeier)
- Create and distribute user surveys for input on potential uses for new Anthology section (Kortemeier, Swarstad Johnson)

June 2015
- Finalize section name and create selection parameters for new Anthology section (Kortemeier, Burk)
- Create list of works to be reclassified for new Anthology section (Kortemeier, Swarstad Johnson)
- Collect and analyze user surveys (Kortemeier, Swarstad Johnson)
- Create list of LCSH or FAST subject headings for use in re-cataloging books for new section (Kortemeier, Swarstad Johnson)

July-August 2015
- Finalize list of works to be reclassified for new Anthology section (Kortemeier)
- Create list of works for *The Poets and Politics of Gender, Women's, Queer, and Feminist Studies* library exhibit (Kortemeier, Burk, Swarstad Johnson); scan works for exhibit (Kortemeier)
- Create shelf space and a shelf label for new section (Swarstad Johnson)
- Process books on item level for new shelf designation (Swarstad Johnson)
- Catalog books for new section: 590 notes indicating physical shelf position, 650 notes incorporating more detailed LCSH/FAST subject headings for individual records as appropriate (Kortemeier)
- Document book processing and cataloging; share photographs and updates with UAPC's Digital Media Coordinator for use on social media (Kortemeier, Swarstad Johnson)
- Reshelve books in new section (Swarstad Johnson, library volunteers)

September-October 2015
- Compile and scan supporting material for *The Poets and Politics of Gender, Women's, Queer, and Feminist Studies* library exhibit from UAPC archives (Kortemeier, Swarstad Johnson)

November 2015
- Write exhibit labels for *The Poets and Politics of Gender, Women's, Queer, and Feminist Studies* library exhibit
- Install physical exhibit (exhibit opens November 30, 2015)

Appendix B

Draft User Survey

1) Think back to a recent time when you needed to find a book. Did you look first on the shelf or in the catalog?

2) Did you find what you needed? If not, what did you do next?

3) How often do you use the Poetry Center's online catalog?
Very often / Sometimes / Never

4) When you use the catalog, do you search:

   a) By title?   Very often / Sometimes / Never

   b) By author?   Very often / Sometimes / Never

   c) By subject?   Very often / Sometimes / Never

   d) Using other search terms? Please specify:

5) The Library is planning a new shelf in the Anthologies section that will highlight female writers. Would you be interested in browsing this new section?

   Very interested / Somewhat interested / Not at all interested

6) Which term for the new section would be most useful to you?
   a) Gender, Women's, Queer, and Feminist Studies
   b) Women's
   c) Feminism
   d) Gender
   e) Gender and Women's Studies
   f) Some alternate combination of the above (please indicate):
   g) Other term(s) (please indicate):