■ **Sarah S. Kortemeier**

I'll Drown My Book

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

BRAVERMAN ESSAY 2016

In 2012, I faced a dilemma in the course of my daily cataloging duties at my home library, the University of Arizona Poetry Center. We had acquired a new anthology, *I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*, whose aboutness was clearly captured in its subtitle—yet I had difficulty representing that aboutness on the shelf or in the catalog; we had no designated spaces in our Anthologies section for conceptual writing or (in particular) writing by women. I began to wonder: was there an argument to be made, in terms of literary warrant and social justice, for the creation of spaces highlighting female and female-identified authors in my home library?

I'll Drown My Book has led me on a journey several years in the making. Women's voices are still underrepresented in literary publishing, as I will show; in order to combat this erasure, I have undertaken a visibility project in my home institution. 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

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in cataloging practices and creating a shelf marking system for anthologies that focus on women's writing.

Background

The University of Arizona Poetry Center is a special-collections library dedicated to contemporary poetry written in or translated into English; I serve there as a Library Specialist, reporting to the Poetry Center Librarian, and my primary duties include reference, acquisitions, cataloging, educational outreach, and metadata/digital archives.

The Poetry Center's physical collections include over 47,000 books, most of which are available to the public in an open-stack, browsable format, shelved alpha by author. 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 separate shelves for anthologies of African American, Native American, and LGBTIQ writing, among others. However, until now, there has been no analogous system highlighting 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 female and female-identified authors; these anthologies are scattered throughout the Anthologies section according (mostly) to geographic affiliation.

The relatively large number of anthologies of poetry written by female and female-identified authors 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 literary 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 discussed with some regularity in the scholarly literature and is also apparent from empirical data. No woman has ever won a Pulitzer Prize or National Book Award for poetry twice; fewer 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 2010-2015 (National Book Foundation; The Pulitzer Prizes). Meanwhile, VIDA: Women in Literary Arts, a research organization, has documented the appearances of women in the pages of prestigious journals, anthologies, and reviewing publications since 2010, finding initially that some major publications (such as the *New Yorker*, the *London Review of Books*, *New Republic*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Times Literary Supplement*) favored male authors and male book reviewers by ratios of 2:1 to 4:1 ("The Count 2010";

Oggins 182); furthermore, at the time the VIDA counts began, both major for-profit publishing houses and independent literary presses appeared to favor titles by male authors by similar margins (Franklin).

So pronounced a bias is likely not the product of individual editorial prejudices, but of less visible and more profound societal forces. John Freeman, the former editor of *GRANTA* magazine, observed in response to the first VIDA count that even though he and his staff solicited male and female authors evenly, the final count of pieces accepted for publication still favored men; he asked the troubling question, "how gendered are our notions of storytelling?" (Page).

The answer may be: very gendered indeed. In a survey of the literature on gender and artistic production, Diana L. Miller finds evidence to suggest that Western cultural ideals of the artist are "implicitly masculine": from the popular image of the artist as tortured loner obsessively focused on art-making (to the exclusion of all else, including domestic duty: a role much more socially acceptable for men than for women), to aesthetic evaluations (which tend to favor the work of men), to the entrepreneurial nature of the artist's labor (which requires behaviors more socially expected of men than of women), female artists—including literary artists—are systematically de-centered in artistic professions (120). Miller posits that this effect may be felt to a lesser degree by artists in fields such as poetry that do not require the massive and irregular time commitments common in other artistic fields, such as film (127). This is possible, but has yet to be quantified—and unfortunately, there is sufficient gender inequality in poetry to go around, as we see in the numbers from VIDA, the Pulitzer Prizes, the National Book Awards, and others.

The good news, however, is that change may be in the air. VIDA's efforts have garnered a great deal of publicity, and the editors of several important literary publications (including *New Republic* and *Harper's*) have publicly committed to making improvements ("The 2015 VIDA Count"). In 2014, Jean Oggins found that the 2010 VIDA count correlated with an increase in selection of female editors and work by female writers in the *Best American* anthology series of 2011—though this effect virtually disappeared in 2012 (192, 193). The 2015 VIDA count gives cause for cautious optimism: the past year's numbers show that some very prestigious venues (*New Republic*, *Harper's*, *GRANTA*) made significant progress toward parity, while other important journals (*Poetry*, *Tin House*, *The Harvard Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *jubilat*, and a hearteningly large number of others) maintained already-commendable levels of gender representation, achieved parity, or actually published more women than men ("The 2015 VIDA Count"). VIDA is now working to expand its reach, conducting separate counts to shed light on the representation of women of color, LGBTIQ women, and women with disabilities, and calling 2015 "The Year of Intersectional Thinking" ("The 2015 VIDA Count"). It's to be hoped that the impact of the original count will be felt in these areas, too.

Despite these causes for optimism, it's clear that much progress remains to be made: the centrifugal forces of decades (and their harmful effects) are unlikely to be dismantled easily or quickly. Given the contemporary history of literary publishing—along with the often-invisible but insidious societal obstacles outlined by Miller—female writers are likely to look at these latest VIDA numbers with hope and approval, but also with caution. Indeed, the most recent VIDA data show progress toward more equitable gender representation in literary publishing, not equity itself—and the numbers, while important, don't measure all forms of bias (see Piper and So's discussion of gender stereotyping in the language of book reviews for another type of potential obstacle faced by female writers).

As long as a gender imbalance persists in literary publishing, we are likely to see a partial erasure of women's voices in poetry, and it is this erasure that I hope to combat in my own local context by highlighting women's writing in UAPC's Anthologies section. This project was designed to accomplish two main goals: to make anthologies of women's poetry more visible on the physical shelf, and also more visible in the library's OPAC through enhanced cataloging practices resulting from item-level subject analysis.

Shelf Marking

The process of making women's anthologies more visible on the Poetry Center's physical shelves proved complicated. Initially, I planned the creation of an entirely new shelf designation for women's anthologies, in the spirit of the shelves devoted to LGBTIQ writing, African American writing, and others that already exist in the library's Anthologies section. This seemed, at first, like a relatively straightforward task.

However, that plan began to falter as soon as I tried to name the new section. I wished to do this both inclusively and precisely, and initially I planned to include the words "gender," "women's," "queer," and "feminist" in the nomenclature. I felt that all four of those terms were necessary in order to include poets who were biologically female; whose gender expression was female; and who adopted radical, queer, and feminist stances. But as I continued to study the literature (especially the current scholarship on feminist and queer cataloging praxis), I became less certain of my ground. Was there a name for this section, I wondered, that could avoid reinforcing oppressive, regressive, and "fixed" gender binaries (Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto), and that would likewise avoid privileging one way of knowing over another? For example, it was quickly apparent that it would not be appropriate to call this section "feminist" only, as some of the female-centric works in UAPC's Anthologies section did not self-identify with the feminist movement or concern themselves with feminist politics. It would, however, be equally inappropriate to eliminate

self-identified feminist, radical, and queer writing from the section, since these political movements have had profound implications for women's poetry as they have for 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 1). Furthermore, as I examined the anthologies, it became clear from the books' editorial statements that an effort to privilege gender in the aboutness of each item (at the expense of other intersectional concerns) might seriously undermine the intentions of the anthologizers, many of whom were speaking to and from a very specific cultural, geographical, or political context in addition to their focus on female and female-identified writers. Should these works be gathered together or "dispersed across disciplines" (Olson and Schlegl 69)?

At this point, I reached out to colleagues at The University of Arizona for advice and informal conversation. One such conversation, with Associate Professor of English Adela C. Licona and Assistant Professor of Digital Culture, Information, and Society Jamie A. Lee, had a particularly strong impact on the course of this project. From our meeting came the idea, first put forward by Dr. Licona, to leave the books in their existing geographic and cultural contexts on the shelves, and to mark each women's anthology instead with a color-coded sticker dot. By doing this, she pointed out, we could also expand the scope of the project well beyond visibility for female and female-identified writers: we could, using differently colored stickers, go on to highlight work that addressed issues of disability, socioeconomic class, and others, heightening visibility for social justice issues amongst our anthologies in a much more ambitious way. This proposal effectively allowed us to let books occupy more than one space on the physical shelf: it created a more fluid, less hierarchical, and arguably partially queered shelving system. I say "partially," since queer theory by its nature "resist[s]...social practices that freeze identities in time and universalize them" (Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto 414); the creation of a shelf classification or marking system is a fixing action, and yet such fixing is (probably) necessary if resources are to be discoverable. But by leaving books in their original context on the shelves and marking them for discoverability according to additional criteria, it is possible to encompass more ambiguity and fluidity within our Anthologies section, 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.

Subject Analysis

As part of this visibility project, I also performed item-level subject analysis, expanding the use of the MARC 650 field in my personal cataloging practice.

As each volume came off the shelf to be marked, it cycled to me before re-shelving; I examined existing bibliographic records and used the 650 to add topical subject terms where appropriate, drawing primarily from LCSH. (The use of subject heading lists like LCSH can also perpetuate problems: see Berman, along with Olson and Schlegl, for detailed analysis of how subject heading lists can exclude and marginalize certain constituencies. However, LCSH in particular has the potential to link many resources together at once because of its widespread use, and it is the controlled vocabulary most compatible with my home institution's cataloging software—an extremely important consideration in practice.) 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 and in the spirit of feminist disruption, interrogation, and interruption (Zhou; Olson, "Mapping Beyond Dewey's Boundaries").

This part of the project enhances visibility for poetry written by women in the OPAC; complete, accurate, thorough bibliographic records are an essential component of a given resource's discoverability. In addition, expanded use of the 650 allows the OPAC (which, after all, is a web resource) to function more effectively 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 Hope A. Olson's 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 ("How we construct subjects"). Additionally, an expanded use of the 650 field seems to me to be one method of embracing the fluidities and ambiguities of gender (Drabinski, "Gendered S(h)elves") by allowing for a multiplicity of subject access points (since the 650 is a repeatable field). Finally, expanded use of the 650 strikes me as an efficient way to revise 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 ix-x)—this in the understanding that such revisions are not assumed to be permanent or perfectible, but occur in response to changing cultural contexts and understandings, and hopefully in dialogue and collaboration with users (Drabinski, "Queering the Catalog").

Plan of Work

This project, which I persist in mentally labeling "sticker dots for social justice," is currently in its second phase. In the fall of 2015, my colleagues and I marked roughly 180 anthologies of writing by female and female-identified authors with blue sticker dots; I also performed detailed subject analysis on

each of the newly marked anthologies, adding terms in the 650 field where this seemed warranted. At the conclusion of this phase, I curated a library exhibit titled "Selections from the Permanent Collection: Building Visibility, One Book at a Time." In this exhibit, I displayed a diverse selection of women's anthologies, highlighting the rich tapestry of poetries, editorial philosophies, and political contexts these works create within the literary landscape. As part of the exhibit, library staff solicited suggestions from users on next steps for the project (see appendix B); in response to this feedback, we will proceed in summer 2016 by marking and updating subject analysis for anthologies that highlight poetry of disability, among others. I anticipate that this project will continue in phases over the next several years; we will continue to highlight underrepresented groups in our Anthologies section as opportunity presents, adapting our initial Plan of Work (see appendix A) for new topics. 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.

Risks and Desired Results

This is an ambitious project, and in some ways it is a risky one. In its initial phase, there was, for example, the risk that some poets might object to the use of their gender as a discovery point (Olson and Schlegl 69; Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto 413); writers may feel that gender is irrelevant to their writing and object to gender-based classifications. This particular risk is, I think, minimal in our specific case, since the anthologies we singled out all used gender as an organizational focus.

In our efforts to highlight women's poetry, we also ran the risk of appearing to "essentialize" female authorship and experience. This is a critique that has often been directed at the feminist movement, especially in the context of tensions over racial identity and issues related to intersectionality. This risk was, to my mind, a very serious one, and it was the major reason for the adoption of a marking system instead of a new shelf designation for women's anthologies. My hope was to highlight women's voices as inclusively, respectfully, and sensitively as possible; I have similar hopes for future phases of the project.

In the final analysis, I hope that by highlighting underrepresented voices in my home library, I will also create a "rhetorical space...where topics can be taken seriously as legitimate subjects for open discussion" (Olson, "Mapping Beyond Dewey's Boundaries" 233). I would like to see the marginalization of certain voices in literary publishing acknowledged as such a "legitimate subject," 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; VIDA, for example, 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 marginalization and erasure in literary publishing. Unlike Shakespeare's Prospero (or, for that matter, the inspiring group of authors featured in *I'll Drown My Book*), I wield no "rough magic" or enormous influence in the literary world—but I do hope to create intellectual and physical spaces for dialogue (with users, staff, and authors) in my home institution, to highlight marginalized voices and enhance their discoverability in that institution, to make the classification process transparent, and to engage poetry readers in a serious interrogation of the way we evaluate literature.

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APPENDIX A

Plan of Work

Poetry Center Anthologies: Highlighting Female and Female-Identified Authors

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 systems that make these authors more visible on the shelf and in the catalog.
- 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 and shelf marking systems create "'rhetorical spaces'…where topics can be taken seriously as legitimate subjects for open discussion" (Olson, "Mapping Beyond Dewey's Boundaries" 233).
- Poetry Center patrons tend to discover materials on the shelf 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.
- A marking system and enhanced subject analysis highlighting 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, Senior (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 for input on issues of nomenclature, intersectionality, and representation (Kortemeier, Burk, Swarstad Johnson)

June 2015
- Create list of works that are candidates for physical marking and subject analysis (Kortemeier, Swarstad Johnson)
- Create list of LCSH subject headings for use in catalog record updates (Kortemeier, Swarstad Johnson)
- Purchase color-coded sticker dots (Kortemeier, Swarstad Johnson)

July-August 2015
- Create list of works for *Selections from the Permanent Collection: Building Visibility, One Book at a Time* library exhibit (Kortemeier, Burk, Swarstad Johnson); scan works for exhibit (Kortemeier)
- Process books on item level with sticker dots (Swarstad Johnson)
- Subject analysis for processed books: 650 notes incorporating more detailed LCSH 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 (Swarstad Johnson, library volunteers)

September-October 2015

- Compile and scan supporting material for *Selections from the Permanent Collection: Building Visibility, One Book at a Time* library exhibit from UAPC archives (Kortemeier, Swarstad Johnson)

November 2015

- Write exhibit labels for *Selections from the Permanent Collection: Building Visibility, One Book at a Time* library exhibit (Kortemeier)
- Install physical exhibit (opening date: November 30, 2015) (Kortemeier, Burk, Swarstad Johnson)

APPENDIX B

User Suggestion Box Constructed for Library Exhibit:

Selections from the Permanent Collection: Building Visibility, One Book at a Time

(Nov. 30, 2015-Jan. 23, 2016)

Acknowledgements