

PARAPHILIAS: The Perversion of Meaning in the Library of Congress Subject Headings

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The Library of Congress is a federal institution that occupies a critical space where medical, social science, political, literary, and other discourses are collected, arranged, and disseminated to Congress and the public. This paper is part of a larger project that examines the social construction of sexual deviance through the lens of the Library of Congress Subject Heading (LCSH), “Paraphilias,” the term that replaced the earlier authorized headings, “Sexual perversion” (1898-1972) and “Sexual deviation” (1972-2007). An intertextual reading of relationships between a specific subject heading and the works to which it affords access reveals and problematizes LCSH as an interface where the prevailing attitudes and assumptions in scholarship emerge in and produce universalized and authorized terms. It also shows the shifts over time in scholarship, including changes in what counts as a perverted expression or behavior. and opens up questions regarding the potential of tagging and social media for organizing materials on sexuality. I suggest that the authorized term “Paraphilias” offers a particularly interesting lens through which to build upon existing research on LCSH and classification more generally. Because LCSH is used by a huge range of library types and sizes, including digital collections, and serves a variety of disciplines and audiences, the purpose of this paper is to raise the disciplinary and historical problems inherent in LCSH and conclude by offering a glimpse of what social media can tell us about sexual deviance. Drawing especially on sexuality scholar Judith Halberstam’s “perverse presentism” and Sanford Berman’s three principles for subject access, I will demonstrate approaches to this particular heading.

This study builds on a body of scholarship that examines the effects of state, scientific, and cultural institutions on sexual politics and practices,¹ as well as classification research in

¹ To name a few: Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009). Jennifer Terry, J., *An American obsession: Science, medicine, and homosexuality in modern society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); John D'Emilio (1983).

Library and Information Studies.² It relies heavily on feminist and queer theories, which expose the inherent slipperiness, expansiveness, and limitations of categories, and situate sexual expression and regulation within historical, social, and political contexts. Such approaches bring various ironies and paradoxes of library classification to light. Categories are necessary for information retrieval. Librarians assign books call numbers and place them on shelves near related subjects, and they assign subject headings so that people can find information on various topics in the catalog. As patrons, scholars of sexuality studies know all too well the joy of browsing and getting swept away in the HQs.

Because LCSH is an institutionalized expression of societal customs and beliefs, it should be understood as a part of an entire matrix of social practices and discourses. It not only reflects mainstream ideas, but it also perpetuates and influences them. The Library of Congress operates at the center of scholarly discourses; research from medical, social science, political, and other disciplines are collected, arranged, and disseminated to Congress and the public. This study will enhance understanding of the role of knowledge production in the construction of deviance by looking to the place where these discourses are stored and categorized.

Doing the History of Sexuality--Perverse Presentism

Taxonomic discourses for sexual practices and identities are constantly changing, expanding, reappropriating, offending, and refusing to be pinned down, presenting a challenge

“Capitalism and Gay Identity.” In *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Barr Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).

² Ellen Greenblatt, “Homosexuality: the Evolution of a Concept in the Library of Congress Subject Headings.” In *Gay and Lesbian Library Service*, ed. Cal Gough, C & Ellen Greenblatt, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1990).; Carole L. Palmer, and Cheryl Knott Malone, “Elaborate isolation: Metastructures of knowledge about women.” *The Information Society*, 17; Hope A. Olson, *The Power to Name: Locating the limits of subject representation in libraries*. (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic, 2002); Hope A. Olson, . *Difference, culture and change: The untapped potential of LCSH*. In Stone, A.T. (Ed.), *The LCSH century: One hundred years with the Library of Congress Subject Headings system*. (Birmingham, NY: Haworth, 2007). Sanford Berman, *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People* (Metuchen, N.J., Scarecrow Press, 1971); Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Boston, Mass: MIT Press, 2000).

