There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.—Michel Foucault

In November 1991 nearly 2,000 faculty members, graduate and undergraduate students, activists, gays, lesbians, queers, queens, butches, femmes, People With AIDS, and heterosexuals converged at Rutgers University to present papers, take part in panels, and discuss important issues with colleagues at the Fifth Annual Gay and Lesbian Studies Conference. The overwhelming diversity of gay and lesbian studies that has manifested itself in academia during the past five years was illustrated by the 100 different events and more than 400 papers on topics such as "The Politics of Camp," "The United(?) States of Queer Theory," "Sexuality, Pornography, Technology," "From Aphrodite’s Girdle to Madonna’s Bustier: The Problem and the Pleasure of the Image in Lesbian Cultural Politics," "Out of Their Humour: Milton, Spenser, Jonson," "Channel Cruising: Gays and Television," "Georgia on My Mind: Homosexuality and the Law," "(Re)Contextualizing Bisexuality," and "Victorian Queries."

As a special collections librarian at the conference, I came away asking myself: How do we in libraries, and principally in special collections, provide services and materials to support this vital, thriving cluster of studies? What can we learn from these studies about how we function as librarians? The conference clearly revealed that special collections repositories are potentially rich resources for revisionist scholars. Periodicals such as Journal of the History of Sexuality regularly publish articles by authors who use a large array of special collections materials—not just books and manuscripts. The notion of the "text," once severely limited in scope, can now include a larger variety of cultural objects, including ephemera, graphics, and realia. But do the procedures we follow to build and describe our collections adequately address the needs of these scholars?

Gay and Lesbian Library Service, a compilation of articles about aspects of gay and lesbian library services selected by editors Cal Gough and Ellen Greenblatt, attempts to

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answer some of these questions from a “gay and lesbian” perspective. At the Rutgers conference, however, a new theoretical approach, “queer theory,” was much in evidence. Queer theory goes beyond the “gay and lesbian” perspective, even questioning the basic assumptions about “gay and lesbian” studies. By applying queer theory to librarianship, I hope to promote a more fundamental questioning of what materials libraries collect, why they collect them, whom they let use them, how they organize them, and even how queer materials can call into question the conventional tenets of library practices and services. In going beyond “gay and lesbian” studies, materials, and services, I hope we can begin a more searching dialogue about how libraries can support gay, lesbian, and queer studies.

QUEER THEORY

Queer theory disrupts the norm. One such disruption occurred when criticism of the Rutgers conference began to come forth from within the “queer” activist community and from some of the conference participants. Queer theorists found the conference to be too white and too male. Other voices with different critical perspectives, some of which have been marginalized by the traditional gay and lesbian movement, were demanding space for their work. What is at issue is no longer simply the inclusion of gay and lesbian studies within mainstream academic education (though that, too, is important); it is an argument for a new approach to examining knowledge and ignorance, power and oppression, privilege and marginalization not only within academia, but also within society at large—including the homosexual community.

The term “queer,” as opposed to the terms “lesbian” or “gay,” emphasizes difference. “Queer” has been reclaimed from its pejorative meaning, in part, because it acknowledges difference, as in the sense of “queer” as “odd.” In her introduction to Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities, Teresa De Lauretis elaborates on the difference between “gay and lesbian” and “queer”:

The term “queer,” juxtaposed to the “lesbian and gay” of the subtitle [of the book], is intended to mark a certain critical distance from the latter, by now established and often convenient, formula. For the phrase “lesbian and gay” or “gay and lesbian” has become the standard way of referring to what only a few years ago used to be simply “gay” (e.g., the gay community, the gay liberation movement) or, just a few years earlier still, “homosexual.” . . . In a sense, the term “Queer Theory” was arrived at not to adhere to any one of the given terms, not to assume their ideological liabilities, but instead, to both transgress and transcend them—or at the very least problematize them.4

The assumption is that “gay and lesbian” denotes a certain political, historically determined approach that excludes many homosexual groups; it is predominantly white and middle-class, and despite the addition of lesbian, it remains overwhelmingly male.
“Gay” assumes an assimilationist political stance: homosexuals are just like everyone else. Queer theory recognizes that the “gay” movement grew out of the efforts of a group of affluent white males to elevate the status of homosexuals within the existing social structure, a structure of which they were already a part, to some extent, by virtue of their gender and race. While the “gay” movement made significant contributions, it also fit sexual identities into the white, male model. The terms “gay and lesbian” do not adequately account for the matrix of identities that all of us have but which is especially recognizable in someone who is black and lesbian, or Chicano and gay, for example.

Avram Finkelstein, a queer activist, further develops the idea of “queer”:

Queers are everywhere; we are everyone. Queerness cuts through every race, ethnic group, class, and belief. The diversity of our community makes us a direct threat to the powers that be. They cultivated a system that relies on keeping marginal groups divided. There has been much queer effort to explore our differences, appreciate them and bond through them. By merely sharing our culture with each other, we have the power to shake loose their grip.

Finkelstein’s language—though more activist in tone, befitting its purpose within the rhetorical context of a queer magazine—echoes that of De Lauretis, suggesting some of the other identities—race, ethnic group, class, belief—that in conjunction with homosexuality may identify the queer. Other important identities, often excluded from the “gay and lesbian” perspective, include bisexuals, leatherfolk, drag queens, transsexuals, conservative homosexuals, and butch/femme lesbians, for example.

Michael Warner takes queer theory a step further, suggesting how the understanding of difference and the experience of queers can be applied to cultural structures:

Every person who comes to a queer self-understanding knows in one way or another that her stigmatization is intricately tied with gender, with the family, with notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fantasy, class identity, truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social display, terror and violence, health care, and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body. Being queer means fighting about these issues all the time, locally and piecemeal but always with consequences. Because the logic of the sexual order is too deeply embedded by now in an indescribably wide range of social institutions, and is embedded in the most standard accounts of the world, queer struggles aim not just at toleration or equal status but at challenging those institutions and accounts.

Queer theory means to go beyond the work of gay and lesbian critics and activists; it means to question fundamental structures of our culture by using our experience as queers to reveal the biases and weaknesses of those structures.
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a leading exponent of queer studies in academia, has made major contributions to the development of queer theory. In her book *Epistemology of the Closet*, she writes that "many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured—indeed, fractured—by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century." She further argues that "an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition." Sedgwick views the issue of homosexuality as central to the way modern Westerners define themselves, their culture, and its structures. She argues that:

the modern crisis of homo/heterosexual definition has affected our culture through its ineffaceable marking particularly of the categories of secrecy/disclosure, knowledge/ignorance, private/public, masculine/feminine, majority/minority, innocence/initiation, natural/artificial, new/old, discipline/terrorism, canonic/noncanonic, wholeness/decadence, urbane/provincial, domestic/foreign, health/illness, same/different, active/passive, in/out, cognition/paranoia, artkitsch, utopia/apocalypse, sincerity/sentimentality, and voluntariness/addiction.8

Sedgwick sees the "closet" and "coming out" as tools to investigate these basic binaries. The "closet" is an epistemological space where knowledge is either forcibly suppressed from outside or willfully withheld from within. In the Western tradition, for example, knowledge about homosexuality has traditionally been suppressed. The constant threat of exposure has caused many homosexuals to withhold this personal knowledge about themselves. As Sedgwick says: "even an out gay person deals daily with interlocutors about whom she doesn't know whether they know or not; it is equally difficult to guess for any given interlocutor whether, if they did know, the knowledge would seem very important." Further, these interlocutors may be "personally or economically or institutionally important" to the lesbian or gay.9 Thus, the "closet" is a locus where power and knowledge meet. The "closet" and "coming out" can thus be used to investigate how knowledge is transmitted or suppressed.

Through the imposition of the "closet," information about queers is kept from being known. The potentially disruptive power of queer knowledge is fundamentally dangerous to the way knowledge has been organized since the nineteenth-century. Following Michel Foucault's reasoning in *The Archeology of Knowledge*,10 large systems of order (like the systems of ordering information in libraries) maintain their integrity and (apparent) seamlessness at all costs. Queer knowledge, which is potentially disruptive, capable of creating fissures in such systems, pointing out their limits, must be silenced or "closeted." The enforcement of at least the appearance of heterosexuality through the maintenance of the "closet" allows the systems of ordering to continue to operate. The
"closet," however, which the system has itself created, threatens constantly to expose the weaknesses of the system. By using the ability to "pass," that is, to appear heterosexual, queers can use the "closet" to gather knowledge about the system that created the closet and can then use this knowledge to identify the illogic, the biases, the homophobia, or the heterosexism within that seemingly unbiased, natural, logical, scientific, "true" system. When the "closet" is opened and a queer discloses this knowledge, "coming out" occurs; the limits of the system are exposed. It is in this way that the "closet" can serve as a tool for locating ruptures in systems.

Sedgwick views the "closet" and its special power for identifying ruptures as an inherent part of the queer experience; yet she also posits that the "closet" and "coming out" can be used as "all-purpose phrases for the potent crossing and recrossing of almost any politically charged lines of representation." Her rationale for this idea echoes that put forward by Foucault, who saw the individual's experience of cultural systems as one of the most important means for evaluating those systems. It is in the realm of actual experience "that a culture, imperceptibly deviating from the empirical orders prescribed for it by its primary codes, instituting an initial separation from them, causes them to lose their original transparency, relinquishes its immediate and invisible powers, frees itself sufficiently to discover that these orders are perhaps not the only possible ones or the best ones." The queer theorist, the queer activist, and, dare I say, the queer librarian, by virtue of his or her experience, has a peculiar vantage point (or vantage points) from which to evaluate the larger structures—whether political, economic, literary, historical—or the structures within libraries.

LIBRARIES
Essex Hemphill, a contemporary black gay poet, writes of his early library experience:

I searched the card catalogue at the local library and discovered there were books about homosexuality in the "adult" section. I wasn’t allowed to check out books from that section because I was only in the sixth grade, but I could read them in the library, which I did, avidly, stopping in almost every day after school for several hours, and continuing this practice until I had devoured everything. What was there for me to read in 1969 was in no way affirming of the sexual identity germinating within me. The materials regarding homosexuality considered it to be an illness or an affliction, and at worst, a sin against God and nature . . . . The books made no references to black men that I can recall, nor were there black case studies for me to examine, and in a few pictures of men identified as homosexual, not one was black.

Nothing in those books said that men could truly love one another. Nothing said that masturbation would be comforting. Nothing celebrated the genius and creativity of homosexual men or even suggested that such men could lead ordinary lives.

When I finished my month-long reading marathon, I put away the last book knowing only that I had homosexual tendencies and desires, but beyond that
awareness I didn’t recognize myself in any of the material I had so exhaustively read. If anything, I could have ignorantly concluded that homosexuality was peculiar to white people, and my conclusion would have been supported by the deliberate lack of evidence concerning black men and homosexual desire.13

Hemphill, in his childhood library experience of seeking out queer materials, confronted the societal prejudices against homosexuality and the structure of the library. His experience is caught in the matrix where the privileging of the nineteenth-century “medicalized” model of homosexuality,14 the taboo of child sexuality, and the exclusion of blacks and homosexuals from society converge. His perspective is queer. Hemphill’s perspective locates rupture points where the library’s policy on access to materials, its approach to collection development, and its organization of materials meet queers.

When libraries confront queer materials, the response is what Gough and Greenblatt have defined as “heterosexist”: “the belief in the inherent superiority of heterosexuality and its right to dominance. Unlike prejudices based on gender, skin color, class, national origin, language, or physical ability, heterosexist assumptions are so insidious that many of us unthinkingly collude with and perpetuate them.”15 Their argument would seem to support Eve Sedgwick’s positioning of homo/heterosexual definition as a major node of thought. In other words, heterosexism is so much a part of our culture, so unthinkingly accepted, that we never even think to question structures, like libraries, to see if they exclude homosexuals.

We usually assume that libraries are organized along some unbiased and naturalistic way of thinking about knowledge. Work by Foucault and others, however, has demonstrated that most, if not all, classification systems are socially constructed and, thus, socially biased. Both the Library of Congress and the Dewey Decimal classification system, developed at the end of the last century, reflect a nineteenth-century, Anglo-American approach to the organization of knowledge. Each system elevates some knowledge over other knowledge, and marginalizes some groups, approaches, and areas of study and the privileges of others. Moreover, each reflects a fundamentally white, affluent, male, heterosexual point of view. Each system is biased against queer knowledge, as is evident in the lack of adequate descriptors for queerness.16 The meta-structure on which both the Library of Congress and the Dewey systems are based and on which our libraries are modelled increasingly conflicts with the structure and content of academic research and undermines the very variety of source materials libraries hope to preserve.17

I would like to identify ruptures in several areas of librarianship—access to materials, collection development, and the organization of materials—applying a queer theoretical perspective by using the “closet” and “coming out” as theoretical tools. Many of the examples I will use are “closeted,” that is, they were told to me by queer librarians who, because of their special knowledge, have witnessed and experienced the heterosexism—if not its most extreme form, homophobia—in standard library procedures. I will retain the “closeted” status of my colleagues who have related these stories
by not disclosing the details of the events (such as collection names). Still, each event is a kind of “coming out,” an expression of special knowledge. The personal process of “coming out” is the process of asking fundamental questions about ourselves and the larger structures in which we operate. Every gay, lesbian, or queer needs to develop this outsider critical paradigm to some degree to survive. Following Foucault’s use of experience for evaluating systems of order and Sedgwick’s grounding of the “closet” and “coming out” within the queer experience, I will examine several anecdotal examples of library operations or services supplied to me by queer librarians. These examples lead to fundamental questions about the structures on which libraries are based and by which they function. My aim is not merely to document the exclusion of gay and lesbian materials and services from library practices, nor to identify ways the structure can allow such materials to be included, but to present the ruptures in those structures caused by queer materials. I propose these ruptures as starting points for further research.

Access to Materials
The following experience of Martin Duberman, a noted historian and director of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at the City University of New York, is a painful indictment of our profession. The conflicts between the “closet” or the withholding of knowledge and “coming out” or the expression of knowledge, figure prominently in his story:

In an attempt to be scrupulously correct, Duberman requested permission from an archive to publish two important letters written by American men in the 1820s. The letters detail the homosexual affair of James H. Hammond and Thomas J. Withers, two significant political figures of the antebellum South. The letters are extremely important for understanding same-sex relations in this time period. After nearly six months of silence, a series of follow-up letters, and the counsel of lawyers, Duberman’s request to publish was denied. The archivist’s explanation was that the donor had “asked that none of the manuscripts be used in a way that might ‘result in embarrassment to descendants.’ The donor was dead, but [the archivist] considered the ‘restriction’ to be ‘still in force.’ He was also of the view that the two Withers letters were unquestionably ‘embarrassing.’”

Duberman decided to publish extracts of the letters anyway, but not without much soul-searching. He dismisses the notion that academia consists of a disinterested community of truth-seekers. Rather, he sees this notion as a useful device for codifying professional behavior and a convenient rationale for denying credentials to women, gays, and ethnic minorities who might challenge the academy’s entrenched values. He clearly believes archivists and librarians are a part of this structure. He goes further: “if the ‘lawless’ tactics I’ve resorted to seem extreme to some, well, so is our [queer scholars’] need; more orthodox tactics (like polite letters of inquiry), have done little to meet it. The heterosexist world has long held a monopoly on defining legal and ethical property, has long imposed its definitions on the rest of us, using them as weapons for keeping us in line by denying us access to knowledge of our own antecedents.”
His "cautionary tale" is not an indictment of all archivists; he readily acknowledges some among our ranks who have been very helpful. He adds, however, that "their attitude is still a minority one within the archival profession as a whole (in the historical profession, too). Many of those who stand guard over the nation's major manuscript collections see their function as protective and preservative—of traditional moral values in general . . . They tend to equate . . . the libidinous with the salacious, and to be profoundly distrustful of both." Moreover, Duberman continues, "some archivists invent obstacles to put in the researcher's path or claim to be hamstrung (and, in truth, even sympathetic curators are) by certain access restrictions which the donor of a given manuscript collection originally appended to the deed of gift."21

The archivist whom Duberman criticizes had, in effect, "closeted" the material; he limited the publication rights to suppress the homosexual content of the letters. He hindered scholarship into the sexual history of the United States, the history of same-sex relations, and the history of the antebellum South. In an ironic twist, the archivist went beyond preserving the physical object for the use of scholars and began to preserve his own vision of society, in which knowledge about homosexuality must be suppressed. He failed to support the open exchange of ideas and the open access to library materials that lead to new understanding. Queer research and queer materials problematize one of the roles we have traditionally undertaken: guardians and preservers of the past. But have we ever asked whose past we are preserving and whose past we are allowing to be discovered?

Duberman's plight in dealing with libraries and archives is not unique. Clearly more research is needed into the specific effects of heterosexism on access to special collections materials.

Collection Development
Queer theory questions the method by which we build our collections by challenging the assumptions underlying how we organize knowledge. The breadth of the queer approach to knowledge subverts the neat disciplinary boundaries to which we are accustomed. If area studies, interdisciplinary centers, and cultural institutes are some of academia's attempts to overcome its racial, gender, ethnic, and religious biases, then gay and lesbian studies, it would appear, could be added among these programs. The current debates about canon and multiculturalism are the academy's (and the library's) growing pains in this respect.22 Libraries have realized the importance of these areas of study for the growth of knowledge and have collected materials accordingly. The nascent queer studies programs persistently ask, however: Have we merely added these area studies into a patriarchal structure that cannot understand them fully, nor is willing to really grapple with them in all their complexity? Is it merely a strategy for segregating these alternative (often minority) voices out of the mainstream of academic pursuits? Is "queerness" really comparable to these other studies?

Gender and racial differences are visible; biases against them are easier to detect. Ethnic and religious differences are somewhat less visible; so are the biases against
Queerness can be invisible. It can remain “in the closet.” Sedgwick addresses the invisibility of the queer identity:

Resonant as the image of the closet is for many modern oppressions, it is indicative for homophobia in a way it cannot be for other oppressions. Racism, for instance, is based on a stigma that is visible in all but exceptional cases (cases that are neither irrelevant, but that delineate the outlines rather than coloring the center of racial experience); so are the oppressions based on gender, age, size, physical handicap.

Further, she views ethnic and religious oppressions as having less visibility or “more discretion” than race and gender, but they also have “ancestral linearity and answerability” to support them. At the most basic level, ethnic and religious minorities can rely on family and tradition for support. The queer, however, can be totally invisible, totally without a support system, or, as is often the case, oppressed within the conventional support systems. This invisibility can lead to total oppression.

Invisibility, however, can also promote a kind of specialized knowledge that disrupts the norm. The queer perspective asks: Do we collect black same-sex materials? Could future scholars research the problems of lesbians with AIDS? Are we documenting the lives of gay Chicano members of the clergy? Are we collecting the primary resource materials of popular culture that allow scholars to reconstruct the cultures these identities inhabit? Is it our mission to document diversity? Queers cannot so easily be reduced to an area studies program because same-sex love crosses race, class, gender, religious belief. It also crosses the disciplines of history, literature, social science, and psychology, to name but a few. “Queerness”—the matrix of identities surrounding a queer—complicates the structure of knowledge, threatening its authority. Similarly, it complicates how we collect materials if we adhere to the traditional organization of knowledge. The typical societal response to this fundamental questioning of authority by queers is homophobia. It follows then to ask: Is our selection guided/constrained by homophobia? And if so, where does it originate? With the selector? the administration? the faculty? the students? the potential donor?

An example may help to point out how queer material reveals biases in collection development decisions. A library has a major collection of the manuscripts by a gay American playwright who was quite open about his homosexuality. At an exhibition opening where some of these items are on display, a former lover (and one-time hustler) of this playwright begins to chat with a staff member about letters he received from the playwright and manuscripts he was given as gifts. The material discusses revisions and performances of the plays. The former lover would like to have them preserved. Would you take time to speak to the man in a cowboy hat and boots at a black-tie reception?

This example is not hypothetical. The curator of the collection responded, “I don’t have time to talk to people like him.” Why? Because of his clothes? Because of his
class? Because he had been a hustler? Because he is openly gay? Apparently it was a combination of these identities that made him too “queer” to be dealt with comfortably by the curator.

**Organization**

Queer materials disrupt the usual organizational procedures in libraries. When queer materials confront the structure of Library of Congress subject headings and their method of application, or the processing routines for manuscript collections, ruptures occur.

Perceiving these ruptures, Sanford Berman has petitioned for the Library of Congress to “abandon the subject heading GAYS, inasmuch as there is no acceptable umbrella term for both gay men and lesbians; [and to] institute a ‘see’ reference from ‘gays’ to GAY MEN and LESBIANS.”24 He follows with a call for the establishment and application of a new series of descriptors for gays and lesbians. His call for subject heading reform is not unlike De Lauretis’s explanation of the term “queer.” GAYS is being used as the collective term for gay men and lesbians. Like De Lauretis, Berman sees that lesbians are excluded from the term GAYS. It really is a term used only for men. The earlier term, HOMOSEXUAL, which was used as a broader term for gays and lesbians until 1987, inappropriately unites a clinical term with the politicized terms of GAY and LESBIAN. If the terms GAY and LESBIAN and HOMOSEXUAL were inappropriate because they really represented the difference between political and medical discourse, the terms GAY and LESBIAN are now being challenged by a new political term, QUEER. This argument is similar to the one concerning the terms NEGRO, AFRO-AMERICAN, and BLACK, which also represent political differences. The very fact that queers exist and demand a space distinct from that of “gays and lesbians” calls into question the structure and process of Library of Congress subject headings.

There is work to be done on the application of subject headings to gay, lesbian, and queer materials. Queer theory asks: If libraries are going to use the headings GAY and LESBIAN and QUEER, when are they going to apply them and how? The application of the subject heading is a politically charged event where homosexuality is concerned. We might not have a problem applying the headings to Oscar Wilde, Gertrude Stein, or Barney Frank, but what about Walter Pater, Gerard Manley Hopkins, or even Roy Cohn? The act of applying queer subject headings is an act of “coming out”—a disclosure of sheltered information. It may even be an act of “outing,” or revealing someone’s homosexuality without his or her consent. This is an especially difficult question for archives of contemporary materials. On the other hand, not to apply the appropriate subject headings hinders a scholar’s search for materials by the new queer authors who define themselves in opposition to gay and lesbian authors. Further, and probably more often, not applying the queer subject headings is a powerful way of “closetsing” information. It creates a silence that often surrounds the closet.

The queer perspective on the processing of manuscript materials asks: Does our organization of materials facilitate access to and promote research for users interested
in same-sex desire? When Eve Sedgwick began to ask questions about the importance of the homosexuality of authors, she confronted a cluster of reasons why she should not ask:

1. Passionate language of same-sex attraction was extremely common during whatever period is under discussion—and therefore must have been completely meaningless. Or
2. Same-sex genital relations may have been perfectly common during the period under discussion—but since there was no language about them, they must have been completely meaningless. Or
3. Attitudes about homosexuality were intolerant back then, unlike now—so people probably didn’t do anything. Or
4. Prohibitions against homosexuality didn’t exist back then, unlike now—so if people did anything, it was completely meaningless. Or
5. The word "homosexuality" wasn’t coined until 1869—so everyone before then was heterosexual. (Of course, heterosexuality has always existed.) Or
6. The author under discussion is certified or rumored to have had an attachment to someone of the other sex—so their feelings about people of their own sex must have been completely meaningless. Or (under a perhaps somewhat different role of admissible evidence)
7. There is no actual proof of homosexuality, such as sperm taken from the body of another man or a nude photograph with another woman—so the author may be assumed to have been ardently and exclusively heterosexual. Or (as a last resort)
8. The author or the author’s important achievements may very well have been homosexual—but it would be provincial to let so insignificant a fact make any difference at all to our understanding of any serious project of life, writing or thought.25

Do we adhere to the same assumptions when we organize our collections? Can we choose what biographical information to include and what to exclude and remain unbiased? And yet, clearly, we often choose to overlook homosexual aspects of people’s lives. Certain knowledge is privileged by the structure and other knowledge is excluded. Most often our author-centered, biography-based approach to organizing collections assumes the primacy of one author, and his or her interactions with other major figures—the “Great People” approach to collecting and processing special collections materials. Even within the collections of important authors, lesser-known correspondents may not be documented as carefully as the major figures. Collections of less important people are often not acquired, or if acquired, not as carefully organized. In this environment, queer relationships have been ignored (if not repressed) by catalogers. The same-sex affairs of major figures are often overlooked. The homosexual lives of minor figures, all-important to reconstructing the history of
homosexual lives, remain unprocessed or minimally processed. The Lesbian Herstory Archives was begun in New York City in 1973 because, as its founder Joan Nestle writes, “we wanted our history to be told by us, shared by us, and preserved by us. We were tired of being the medical, legal, and religious other.” Nestle adds that “the roots of the Archives lie in the silenced voices, the love letters destroyed, the pronouns changed, the diaries carefully edited, the pictures never taken, the euphemized distortions that patriarchy would let pass.” Polly Thistlethwaite, in an article on the Archives, sums up the state of collecting lesbian materials:

Public libraries and academic archives, including ‘women’s’ archives, have both blatantly refused and quietly failed to document lesbian lives and culture. In response to pervasive homophobia and sexism, ‘closeted’ lesbian lives are secreted from friends, family, and coworkers, and lesbian culture and sensibilities are defined against and apart from the heterosexual world.

Both Nestle and Thistlethwaite have identified ruptures in the ways libraries collect lesbian materials, adding their actual experiences to the theoretical categories Sedgwick outlines. Probably every gay, lesbian, or queer who has worked in special collections has witnessed the same kinds of “closetings” of knowledge.

One particularly poignant story was shared with me recently. It took place several years ago when a library intern was given the manuscript collection of a woman author to process. The collection contained the author’s and lover’s personal correspondence, which was interfiled. The content of the correspondence reflected not only the writing process of the author, but also the long-term relationship between the two women. My friend saw the correspondence as doubly important and proposed to maintain the original filing system, despite established practice, which would have separated the letters of the correspondents. When the curator reviewed the proposed organization of the collection, the correspondence was separated. My friend pursued the issue and, after some discussions with the director, struck a compromise that a note would be included in the scope and contents note, linking the two women’s correspondence. Whether or not blatant homophobia motivated the curator to split the correspondence and not to note its original arrangement is irrelevant. The organizational system under which she was operating legitimated her decision. It was only the prolonged protestsations of a queer intern who saw the importance of the information beyond the restrictions of the prescribed structure that preserved at least some of these lesbians’ lives and a small portion of lesbian history.

Queer materials often languish in the backlogs of books and manuscripts long after less “problematic” items have been processed. Perhaps the subject headings are too difficult to assign appropriately. Perhaps these materials will receive little use (though the increasing amount of queer research would argue otherwise). Perhaps the gay and lesbian area studies program is small and not given priority in the librarywide
cataloging plan. Or perhaps the decision is less conscious, more “heterosexist.” Queer materials go beyond pointing out the problems of these library procedures; they question the structure of knowledge on which the procedures are based. In response, these materials are the most closeted of all. Not only is there little, if any, bibliographic access in many cases, but also they are almost always literally locked up.

The research that will lead to an understanding of the “passionate language of same-sex attraction,” the meaning of same-sex love in different historical periods, and the impact of a person’s homosexuality on his or her work can be done using our collections. Unfortunately, scholars will be impeded by the organization and description of the materials at every turn. They will encounter the silences our organizational structures have built around the lives of homosexuals. We will need to understand and support these scholars’ research and the problems inherent in our collections. Queer scholars working in our collections will question the organization of those collections, point out the omissions, and use their matrix of identities to unlock the “closets” that have been built around queer knowledge.

The issue of organization and the loss of information about queers suggests there is much work to do to understand and eradicate the problems. One place to start is for queer librarians to begin to share their “closeted” processing stories. I was heartened to learn that there was a panel discussion, “Finding Sex and Gender in Archives,” at the 1992 meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Montreal.

SILENCES
Silences surround the closet. Queers confront silences about ourselves daily. Those who are “out of the closet” break silences every day. Essex Hemphill confronted silences as a boy: silences about sexuality, about blacks, about homosexuality—silences created by the culture and perpetuated by the library. Martin Duberman confronted silences in letters not responded to, approval for publication denied. The potential donor of the playwright’s letters confronted silence about his offer; the collection remains silent and unused in the back of his closet. Students looking for queer authors will often confront only a silence in the catalogue.

Michel Foucault, in his *History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, describes the effect silence had on the decline of discourse about sexuality in the seventeenth century. He writes:

This was not a plain and simple imposition of silence. Rather, it was a new regime of discourses. Not any less was said about it; on the contrary. But things were said in a different way; it was different people who said them, from different points of view, and in order to obtain different results. Silence itself—the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers—is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things
said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.²⁹

In short, not to say something is a way of saying it. The act of exclusion or silence about homosexuality necessarily creates a discourse about homosexuality. We librarians enter this kind of discourse with our collections when we acquire, catalogue, allow access, and organize. We have scholars working in the area of queer studies who will need to use the resources we maintain. They will apply their "queer" methods to our materials. The better we understand their scholarship, the better we can provide them with the materials and services they need for their research. The better we can understand the "many silences" we have created around homosexuality, the better we can understand the discourses that are possible and take part in them in a meaningful way. The more queer librarians who "come out" with their "closeted" experiences of the structures of libraries and break the silence, the more ruptures in library structures will be identified and the greater the possibility of a different, less homophobic structure.

NOTES

2. Work in the history of medicine like that of Sander Gilman and Elaine Showalter relies heavily on a variety of materials from manuscripts to paintings to anatomical models as they investigate the meaning of medicine in its social context. I have seen increases in the use of the historical medical materials in my collection by students reconstructing the late nineteenth century 'medicalization' of sexuality including books of manners, ephemeral pamphlets on women's health, and students' notes on gynecological courses.
10. For a detailed discussion of this idea, see Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*.
and The Discourse on Language. Trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982, 12. In the introduction, Foucault lays out the 19th century development of the field of the history of thought, pointing out its hesitancy to grapple with “discontinuity, of series, of limits, unities, specific orders, and differentiated autonomies and dependencies.” He adds, “If the history of thought could remain the locus of uninterrupted continuities, if it could endlessly forge connections that no analysis could undo without abstraction, if it could weave, around everything that men say and do, obscure synthesis that anticipate for him, prepare him, and lead him endlessly towards his future, it would provide a privileged shelter for the consciousness . . . .” 12. In various forms, this theme has played a constant role since the nineteenth century.


14. James Jones, We of the Third Sex: Literary Representations of Homosexuality in Wilhelmine Germany (New York: Peter Lang, 1990). Jones is one among many scholars who are investigating the medical construction of homosexuality from 1869 onward.


17. While not specifically mentioning libraries, Foucault addresses the inadequacy of such subject-oriented structures in The Archaeology of Knowledge when he calls on us to “question those divisions or groupings with which we have become so familiar. Can one accept, as such, the distinction between the major types of discourse, or that between such forms or genres as science, literature, philosophy, religion, history, fiction, etc., and which tend to create certain great historical individualities?” 22.


22. Ted Gordon and Wahneema Lubiano make a compelling argument for the far-reaching implications of multiculturalism in “The Statement of the Black Faculty Caucus” from the University of Texas: “Multiculturalism, as an organizing principle to which universities are increasingly paying at least lip service, is understood at its most simplistic to mean exposure to different cultures. Simple exposure, however, is absolutely meaningless without a reconsideration and restructuring of the ways in which knowledge is organized, disseminated, and used to support inequitable power differentials.” This statement first appeared in The Daily Texan, University of Texas at Austin, and is reprinted in Debating P.C.: The Controversy Over Political Correctness on College Campuses. Ed. Paul Berman (New York: Dell Publishing, 1992), 249-257.

23. Sedgwick, Epistemology, 75.

26. I have raised this set of issues with a number of archivists both heterosexual and queer. Their responses included specific examples of the problems I have cited, a recognition that little has been written about heterosexism (or about the inclusion of sexuality in general) in processing, and a sense that historically the problem has been greater. While a few institutions are rethinking their procedures, much work remains to be done. Procedures need to be revised, but even more important, the problem needs to be made widely known so that we do not collude with any heterosexism in our processing of materials. I would especially like to thank Ginny Daley, Dan Luckenbill, Brenda Marston, Bett Miller, Nancy Shawcross, Deborah Shelby, and Brad Westbrook for their ideas about these issues during telephone interviews I conducted.

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