Building a Queer Classification System

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Background
Out on the Shelves has been Vancouver’s only LGBTQ2IA+ library since 1983.
- Community lending library
- Volunteer-run
- Donation-based / unfunded
- New classification built and implemented in 2018

Old → New

Scheme & Physical Layout
Out on the Shelves Library Classification System

- The Out on the Shelves Library Classification System recognizes that it is imperfect, but intends to be transparent while incorporating clear pathways for future modifications, where flexibility and change are encouraged. It recognizes that with a hierarchal classification system it cannot avoid reproducing and privileging certain perspectives and norms. It can however, lay bare the structure, decisions, and processes by which it does so.

Constraints of Space & Labor
It was essential that this system be simple enough for volunteers to apply, many of whom have little-to-no previous library training. Their perspectives as community members are invaluable however, and many participated in the re-classifying and implementation process. Additionally, although there is an extraordinary amount of richness and complexity in this queer collection, the reality of Out on the Shelves as a small library that facilitates browsing also kept the scheme quite simple.

Familiar with other LGBTQ2IA+ libraries? Add them here

The new classification system was built around four main goals to address these problems, that it be:
- Updated to reflect current language
- Logically ordered and arranged
- A living system, responsive to context & community
- Maintain a historical record of decisions & changes

Key Considerations
Problems from the old system to fix:
- Lack of consistent principles of division
- Lack of mutual exclusivity between categories
- Defunct classification codes
- Alphabetic arrangement hindered collocation
- Implied gay, cis-, male default

The Irony in Queer Hierarchy
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