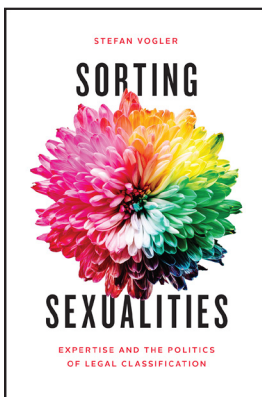


the ingenuity of the MC—and not merely the experiences of the studied backpack Hip Hop fan—appreciatively remains at the forefront of this work.

The breadth of the referenced verses-as-text is both impressive and necessary. Becker thankfully does not simply focus on one era or region of Hip Hop culture and music. Instead, he features work from global megastars like Drake, Kanye West, Nicki Minaj, Chance the Rapper, Snoop Dogg, Kendrick Lamar, Beyonce, and (her husband) Jay-Z; legends like MC Lyte, Slick Rick, the late Shock G and (his former backup dancer) 2Pac, the late Biz Markie, Rakim, Nas, Ghostface Killah, LL Cool J, and Big Daddy Kane; and lesser-known underground luminaries including Chicago's Vakill, Pennsylvania's Count Bass D, Philadelphia's Bahamadia, the late Big L, and the late MF Doom. Unlike many similar texts, *What's Good* does not show a preference for so-called Golden Era sources but instead engages with work that was released as long ago as 1979 and as recently as the last several years. Interestingly, Becker often puts MCs' work from widely different eras in direct conversation with each other to great results. As a consequence of this approach, *What's Good* is a uniquely enjoyable, entertaining, energetic, and thought-provoking analysis of the ever-evolving art of MCing.

As someone who learns aside college students in a variety of contexts with Hip Hop at the center, *What's Good's* regional, topical, and temporal breadth and depth is especially appreciated. Becker's refreshing coverage of the art of MC would make it a solid supplementary addition to many Hip Hop Studies syllabi. It would also prove helpful for teaching librarians looking to incorporate Hip Hop into their praxis. Without question, *What's Good: Notes on Rap and Language* is recommended for both certified *Stretch & Bobbito Radio Show* tape traders and those among us who are newer to appreciating the arguably greatest cultural force of the last half century. —Craig Arthur, Virginia Tech

Stefan Vogler. *Sorting Sexualities: Expertise and the Politics of Legal Classification.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021. 280 p. Paperback, \$30 (ISBN: 9780226776767)



What is classification? What is its purpose and its impact in different institutional contexts? What can those impacts add up to in our material realities? *Sorting Sexualities* encourages us to ask these questions when we think about and describe sexuality. This slim but dense volume delves deeply into the ways that sexuality is seen and understood in different legal settings. In doing so, it leads the reader to confront the contradiction between our common social understanding of sexuality as a purely personal aspect of one's identity, and the fact that the state has claimed a significant level of power in legal settings to define what is "normal" and what is "deviant" in sexuality. State interests can have enormous impacts on the lives of those whose sexuality is scrutinized and controlled

by those definitions.

The introduction establishes the book's focus on two specific legal settings in which courts are called upon to "determine" a person's sexuality: LGBTQ+ asylum determinations in US immigration, and the evaluation and carceral placement of sex offenders, largely alternating between these two settings chapter by chapter. The first two chapters establish historical context and theoretical backdrop for much of the analysis in the rest of the book. Chapter 1 describes nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century ideas of "sexual deviancy" that lumped non-consensual sex and queerness together, deeply affecting how we think about those topics

today. The association between the two remains alive in politics and policies around sexuality. Chapter 2 explores the wide differences between conceptions of sexuality in different legal settings. The differences can stem from whose expertise informs the construction of categories of sexuality, and the context of the cultural and historical moment in which policies are formed. Vogler also points out that how sexuality is understood in a given legal setting can have large impacts on people's rights of participation in society when their sexuality is under scrutiny.

In these early chapters, Vogler acknowledges that a significant bulk of the book deals with how the sexuality of men, people assigned male at birth, and people who have penises is seen and understood. He offers a very general framing for how his analysis can potentially impact and apply to people of other genders, but the remainder of the book does not present his observations and analysis in a more generalizable way. The author also acknowledges in this early section that sex offenders tend not to be sympathetic subjects, and that lumping non-consensual sex with queerness can be harmful. In the book itself, his explanation of why sex offenders' legal setting is significant to examine in queer studies feels disconnected from any framework of sexual consent that I think many everyday readers will likely want to see acknowledged. This may be a convention of one or more of the disciplines that he writes within. Vogler explains his argument somewhat more clearly in an interview for the New Books Network's *New Books in Gender* podcast. There, he notes that sex offender law is exceptional in that it allows the state to seek the indefinite confinement of an individual through civil commitment after they have already served a criminal sentence. Exceptional forms of law created for a singular population like sex offenders can often be expanded in application from one population to many in moments of moral panic. The civil commitment statutes also codify a counterintuitive view of sex offenses not as discrete behaviors to be penalized, but as stemming from a diagnosable sexuality or sexual orientation of the offender (Stuart, 2021).

For librarians, chapters 3 through 6 will be particularly interesting. Here, Vogler explores how courts rely on non-state field expertise when laws call on them to identify a subject's sexuality and manage perceived risk based on it. This both legitimizes particular types of expertise and strengthens the state's own authority and control. These concepts will resonate with library workers who engage with and teach about authority in their work. Chapter 3 traces a struggle for authority between psychiatry and forensic psychology, two professional fields with different approaches to evaluating and understanding the mental health and fitness of sex offenders and building penal categorizations based on them. By contrast, chapter 4 portrays a process by which LGBTQ+ asylum determinations in US immigration came to be informed by "insurgent networks" of lawyers, activists, and "lay" experts who articulated the significance of subjects' narratives of their own sexuality. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the ways that the state identifies sexuality and "measures" or evaluates risk to self or society based on that identification. Chapter 5 details the asylum complex's gradual shift over time from the 1990s, when evidence of a person's sexuality included things like their responses to invasive questions about sex acts that they had performed, through current adjudicators' emphasis on how the asylum seeker characterizes their own sexuality. Chapter 6 offers a contrasting example in the case of sex offenders. Though not advocating for leniency for sex offenders, Vogler takes some care to point out that courts tend to value evidence stemming from problematic tests like polygraphs and penile plethysmographs as "objective" measures of sexuality.

The last few sections of the book bring together many of the threads of the earlier chapters by exploring the levels of control the state can exert over subjects' participation in society, rein-

forcing the connection between this control and the elements of nineteenth-century discourse on “deviant sexuality” that persist into the present. For asylum cases, adjudicators seek to understand the risk of persecution that the asylum seeker faces if they are returned to their home country. Narrative evidence from the asylum seeker is situated alongside state intelligence and news reports on the political safety conditions for queer people in different countries. For sex offenders, adjudicators seek to assess the risk that the offenders pose toward others, resulting in the use of actuarial assessments that are designed to boil the assessment down to as few questions as possible, often completed without the input of the individual in question. The book particularly points out the assessment’s tendency to attribute “sexually violent predator” status to offenders and the consequences of that status: a sentence of incarceration and civil commitment afterward, essentially an underexamined form of extended incarceration. The conclusion brings together parallels between asylum and sex offender cases, particularly where the assessment of risk associated with sexuality plays an enormous role in adjudicating what rights of citizenship and participation in society an individual may have. Vogler points out that the state tends to enroll different networks of non-state expertise to legitimize and inform its policies and stances on sexuality according to what is politically advantageous at the time. Vogler’s final argument encourages us to rethink how we understand sexuality in general, not as a personal and individualized matter of identity, but an area in which the state constitutes its power.

Ultimately, Vogler challenges us to understand that anti-queerness and sex negativity continues to animate legal complexes that regulate sexuality. As we have seen in the year since this book was published, the few gains that have been made in LGBTQ+ rights are easily imperiled as long as that is the case. Vogler’s work can be particularly interesting for critical catalogers. The author traces an expansive history of how descriptive language and categorizations evolved in two institutional settings. In library cataloging and classification, it is not often acknowledged that descriptive practices summarize entire worlds of knowledge, often constituted through both significant battlegrounds and significant coalitions between different professional fields. These conflicts and alliances are then reduced to just a few descriptive metadata fields. Convention encourages catalogers to assert “neutrality” by using the language that appears on an item being cataloged to describe it. But what leads authors and publishers to use particular forms of language? Critical practitioners in our field largely acknowledge that choosing to conform to a particular “preferred” term to describe something often means participating in battles that are really about who gets to be seen, counted, and treated as human. But whose battles are they? Where do those battles play out? What are the legal and social routes by which this language finally makes its way to libraries through written and classifiable resources? And when we use state-sanctioned language and state-based criminal classifications to describe and organize our resources, are we aware of how the state derived that language? Do we understand the political and cultural forces that shape how we describe our own resources? Vogler delves deeply into that context in a way rarely explored in our own literature. This book can deeply inform how we think about the way sexuality is seen and understood in our own institutional contexts. — *Anastasia Chiu, New York University*

Reference

Stuart, R. (host). (2021, July 7). Stefan Vogler, “Sorting Sexualities: Expertise and the Politics of Legal Classification.” Univ. of Chicago Press, 2021. [Audio podcast episode]. In *New Books in Gender*. New Books Network.