

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

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Meeting Date 10/24/23



## Board of Trustees Public Comment Request Form

Anyone wishing to address the Board must arrive early and sign up with library staff at least 10 minutes before the scheduled start of the meeting. Please note that forms must be submitted in person at the Board of Trustees meeting. Comments will be heard in the order in which requests are received.

\*Name David Rice

\*Agenda Item or Topic  
Queerfully and Wonderfully Made

Group Represented (If applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

County of Residence Christian County

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a Christian County Library Card Yes

*\*Required Information*



Today I would like to bring the board's attention to an incident that occurred after I suggested two books for purchase. I recently discovered a new book publishing company, Heroes of Liberty. Their motto is American Values, one story at a time. They have beautifully illustrated books for children ages 7-12 which teach children valuable lessons, connect them to their American heritage, and the founding principles of our great nation. When I saw they published two books in this series about Thomas Sowell and Justice Clarence Thomas, two men who I greatly admire, I jumped at the chance to request these books for our library! As always, I double checked that the CCL didn't already own these books and weren't available through Mobius. These books were not available in any library, so I went ahead and ordered them.

I soon received an email informing me that *Clarence Thomas: A Justice for All* by *Larry Elder* would not be purchased because it was not available through the library's vendors. I responded to the individual who sent me the notification and asked her to reconsider this purchase. I pointed out how our library has at least 6 children's books about the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, 9 children's books on Justice Sonia Sotomayor and none about the great American patriot, Justice Clarence Thomas. Clarence Thomas's life story is one all children should know about. His childhood was difficult and he overcame great adversity to earn a coveted spot on our nation's Supreme Court. However, the individual from the collections department ignored my requests to purchase this book and provided me with a new reason for not purchasing the book—the Heroes of Liberty publishing house was new to the market and unvetted, therefore untrustworthy. At this point, I also noticed that the Thomas Sowell biography, purchased by the CCL, was listed in the online catalog as ADULT nonfiction. However, this is a book written for children ages 7-12, and by the CCL standards, this book should

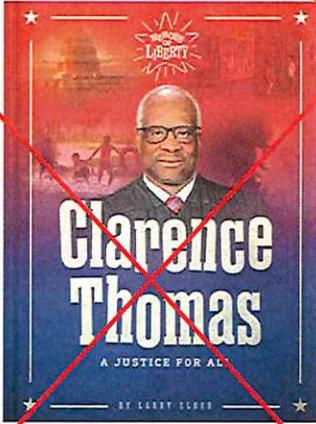
have been listed in the children's nonfiction section. These two incidents didn't strike me as a coincidence. The library's stance on embracing intellectual freedom became clear to me—diversity of view only matters when discussing gender ideology but not when highlighting the intellectual achievements of people of color.

Concerned, I responded to this message and copied Renee and pointed out these realizations. Renee responded to my email. The misplacement of the *Sowell* book was due to a clerical error and she would provide access to the *Thomas* book through interlibrary loan; in the future, the library would consider adding books about Clarence Thomas should there be any demand. Apparently, it's ok for other libraries to have *Clarence Thomas: A Justice for all*, but not at the CCL. In the past, I have also requested books which depict a bold and courageous person of color. However, the books were rejected by the collections department. One book was *Pocahontas* by Ingri and Edgar D'Aulaire.

This library doesn't want children to read about people of color who do NOT see themselves as victims. Instead, they have filled the shelves with discredited antiracist views that expose children to the critical race theory. This is an example of the bigotry of low expectations which supports the idea that there is no variety of thought among people of color. This is false and has no place in CC.

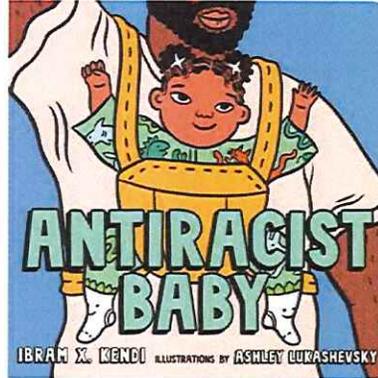
It's been over a week now, and I have yet to receive a response from the library about why *Clarence Thomas: A Justice for All* is being kept off our shelves. Is it because he is black? Or is it because he's a conservative? Or both?

THE CHRISTIAN COUNTY LIBRARY SAYS.....

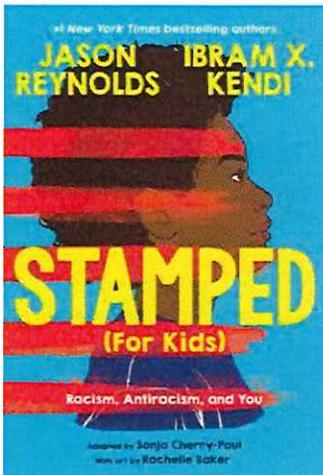
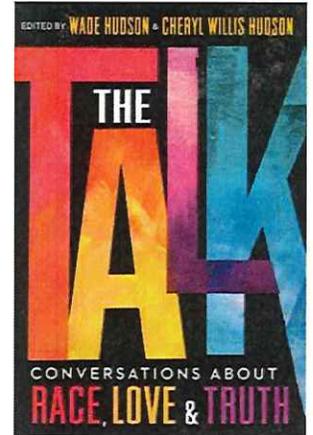


This is a story about overcoming adversity, and how the power of love, faith and patriotism can inspire a person to become the best he or she can become.

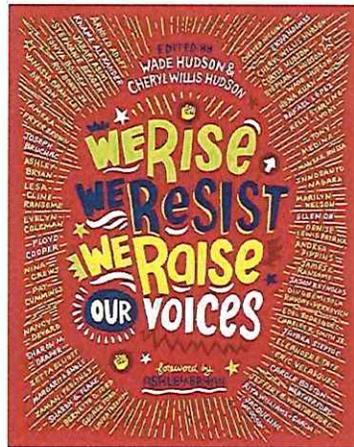
YES!! 3X



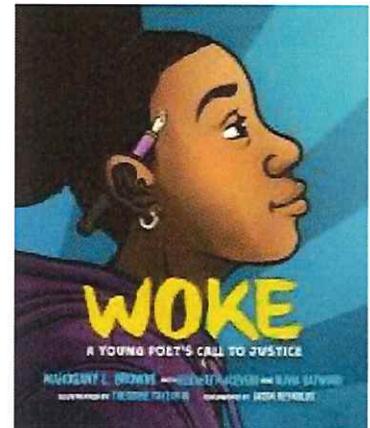
YES!!



YES!!



YES!!



YES!!

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\*Name Alfred Bobe

\*Agenda Item or Topic  
Library Material

Group Represented (If applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

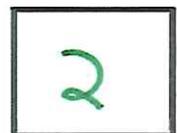
County of Residence Christian

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a Christian County Library Card NO

*\*Required Information*



A / Fred Bohe (Fred) #2

THE UNFORTUNATE CHANGES IN AMERICA  
I AM AN UNASHAMED BORN AGAIN BELIEVER IN JESUS  
CHRIST AS LORD AND SAVIOUR AND I BELIEVE IN THE  
INFALIBILITY OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.  
I AM ALSO A PROUD VETERAN.

I HAVE LIVED LONG ENOUGH TO SEE OUR NATIONS  
MORAL DETERREORATION.

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN IT WAS NOT OFFENSIVE TO  
SAY, ONE NATION UNDER GOD AND WE STOOD FOR THE  
FLAG AND FOR GOD.

THERE WAS A TIME NOT LONG AGO THAT IN RURAL  
AMERICA, SCHOOL STUDENTS LOADED THEIR RIFLES  
AND HUNG THEM ON THEIR GUN RACKS IN THEIR  
PICKUPS. THEY DROVE TO SCHOOL. WHEN THE BELL  
RANG AT THE END OF THEIR DAY, THEY WENT OUT TO  
HUNT DEER, NOT THEIR FELLOW CLASS MATES. THE  
TEN COMMANDMENTS WERE ON THE WALL TO REMIND  
THEM, "THOU SHALL NOT KILL" ETC.

THERE WAS A TIME NOT LONG AGO WHEN MARRIAGE  
WAS CONSIDERED SACRED. THERE WERE LAWS IN  
PLACE, LIKE THE ALLIENATION OF AFFECTIONS,  
WHICH NOT MANY OF OUR YOUNGER GENERATION  
UNDERSTAND. THOSE LAWS WERE IN PLACE TO  
DISCOURAGE ADULTRY AND DESTROYING THE HOME.

WE HAVE LEGALIZED ABORTIONS WITHOUT CAUSE,  
DRUGS WITHOUT NEEDS, GAMBLING AND MORE. NONE  
OF WHICH HAS IMPROVED OUR NATION.

THE NEWS MEDIA WOULD NOT SHOW THE FILMS THEY  
HAVE OF HAMAS SOLDIERS PLUCKING OUT A MAN'S  
EYES AND CUTTING OFF A WOMAN'S BREAST. THEN  
SLICING HER BELLY OPEN AND BEHEADING THE BABY  
THAT WAS INSIDE HER.

THERE IS A NEED FOR NOT SHOWING MATERIALS THAT  
CONTRIBUTE TO THE DECENSATIZING OF HUMAN LIFE.  
THERE ARE LAWS AGAINST PORNOGRAPHIC  
MATERIALS BECAUSE THEY CONTRIBUTE TO AN  
INCREASE IN PEDIFILES, RAPE, HUMAN TRAFFICKING  
AND MORE.

NO ONE, LET ALONE CHILDREN SHOULD BE EXPOSED  
TO BOOKS, MAGAZINES AND PHOTOS, ON HOW TO  
MUTILIZE THE HUMAN BODY, JUST TO JUSTIFY THE  
DESIRES OF ANY GROUP.

I NEVER THOUGHT WE WOULD LEGALIZE SAME SEX  
MARRIAGES AND IMPOSE ACCEPTANCE OF THIS  
LIFESTYLE ON CHRISTIANS WHO AGREE WITH THE  
BIBLE'S CONDEMNATION OF SUCH.

I BELIEVE OUR FUTURE IS THE SAME AS IT WAS FOR  
SODOM AND GAMORAH IF WE CONTINUE DOWN THIS  
PATH.

THERE'S NOT ENOUGH TIME TO COVER ALL THAT I  
HAVE SEEN THAT HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE PRESENT  
IMMORAL MINDSET OF OUR NATION SO I WILL COME  
TO THE POINT.

IT IS WRONG TO PLACE ANYTHING IN OUR PUBLIC  
LIBRARY THAT WOULD HAVE NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON  
CHILDREN'S MINDS.

I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT SOME OF OUR COLLEGE  
STUDENTS ARE SUPPORTING HAMAS'S CRUEL  
PRACTICES AND WANTING THE ERADICATION OF THE  
JEWISH NATION.

THERE IS A SPIRITUAL WAR BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL  
GOING ON. I PRAY WE CHOSE TO DO THAT WHICH IS  
GOOD.

Meeting Date 10-24-23 \*



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\*Name Gretchen Garrity

\*Agenda Item or Topic  
Catalog

Group Represented (If applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

County of Residence Christian County

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a Christian County Library Card yes

*\*Required Information*

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lgbtq+ people  
exist..

That doesn't mean  
explicit material  
belongs in the  
children's section



Righttowinozarks.com

## Mostly Positive Sources Regarding Traditional Classification Systems

<https://www.oclc.org/en/dewey.html>

<https://sixthformstudyskills.ncl.ac.uk/libraries/overview-the-dewey-decimal-system/>

<https://www.oclc.org/en/dewey.html>

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/12513/12513-h/12513-h.htm>

<https://www.oclc.org/en/dewey/resources/teachingsite.html>

<https://www.oclc.org/content/dam/oclc/dewey/versions/webdewey/webdewey2-demo.pdf>

<https://msrosenreads.edublogs.org/tips-for-researching/library-organization/dewey-decimal-classification-system/>  
(Excellent for kids)

<https://erinleebarsan.wordpress.com/2012/11/15/on-the-abandonment-of-the-dewey-decimal-classification-system/>

<https://corodata.com/do-it-like-dewey>

<https://www.newlouisiana.org/i-am-a-conservative-public-librarian/>

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**Note:** All graphics inside this packet are from a Video Presentation: **Structure and Power: Information Literacy for Liberation with Emily Drabinski:** ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ztq\\_tjtl4zg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ztq_tjtl4zg))

- 1) "Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction", by Emily Drabinski ([https://digitalcommons.liu.edu/brooklyn\\_libfacpubs/9/](https://digitalcommons.liu.edu/brooklyn_libfacpubs/9/)).
- 2) "Queer Browsing and the Library of Congress Subject Headings: Can user-generated tags enhance subject access to LGBTQ+ material?" By Ellena G. Moyses (In partial only. Complete here: <https://hcommons.org/deposits/objects/hc:39538/datastreams/CONTENT/content>).
- 3) "American Library Assn. Strips name of Dewey Decimal System creator from annual award" by Michael Schaub (<https://www.latimes.com/books/la-et-jc-dewey-name-removed-library-association-20190626-story.html>).
- 4) "Questioning Authority: Changing Library Cataloging Standards To Be More Inclusive to a Gender Identity Spectrum," by Amber Billey and Emily Drabinski (<https://read.dukeupress.edu/tsg/article-abstract/6/1/117/137390/Questioning-AuthorityChanging-Library-Cataloging?redirectedFrom=PDF>).
- 5) "Racism in the Dewey Decimal System," By Anna Gooding-Call (<https://bookriot.com/racism-in-the-dewey-decimal-system/>).
- 6) "Access to Library Resources and Services for Minors: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights," (<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/minors>).
- 7) "What is Critical About Critical Librarianship?" by Emily Drabinski ([https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc\\_pubs/537/](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_pubs/537/))
- 8) "Critical Information Literacy" By Emily Drabinski and Eamon Tewell ([https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1638&context=gc\\_pubs](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1638&context=gc_pubs))

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2013

## Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction

Emily Drabinski  
*CUNY Graduate Center*

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# Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction

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Emily Drabinski

## ABSTRACT

Critiques of hegemonic library classification structures and controlled vocabularies have a rich history in information studies. This project has pointed out the trouble with classification and cataloging decisions that are framed as objective and neutral but are always ideological and worked to correct bias in library structures. Viewing knowledge organization systems from a queer perspective, however, challenges the idea that classification and subject language can ever be finally corrected. Engaging queer theory and library classification and cataloging together requires new ways of thinking about how to be ethically and politically engaged on behalf of marginal knowledge formations and identities who quite reasonably expect to be able to locate themselves in the library. Queer theory invites a shift in responsibility from catalogers, positioned to offer functional solutions, to public services librarians, who can teach patrons to dialogically engage the catalog as a complex and biased text, just as critical catalogers do.

Libraries are spaces where language really matters. Most of what we hold on our shelves and in our electronic databases are collections of words: books, journal articles, pamphlets, and ephemeral material, such as zines. Libraries are also spaces of control, and not just controls about noise and food and when books are due. The materials themselves are linguistically controlled, corralled in classification structures that fix items in place, and they are described using controlled vocabularies that reduce and universalize language, remarkably resistant to change. In terms of organization and access, libraries are sites constructed by the disciplinary power of language. Librarians of all kinds—conducting research in library and information studies (LIS) programs, working in technical services, serving at the reference desk, and teaching in the information literacy classroom—work within and against these linguistic structures: we build and extend them, and we teach users how to navigate them.

Critiques of these disciplinary library structures of classification and controlled vocabularies have a rich history in information studies, one that can be roughly dated to the late 1960s and early 1970s (Gilyard 1999). Sanford Berman, a US librarian working at the University of Zambia, found that his Zambian users had a very different relation to the term “Kafirs”

than US users did: while “Kafirs” is simply descriptive in the US context to US catalogers, it was virulently racist in Zambia (Gilyard 1999, 3). The idea that language has meaning only in context, an idea articulated abstractly in fields like philosophy, comparative literature, and anthropology, was made very materially evident: subject headings, often cast by catalogers as a kind of pure, objective language, are not; where and when and by whom subject headings are used makes all the difference in terms of meaning.

Berman’s insight—one shared by other catalogers, including A. J. Foskett, Steve Wolf, and Joan Marshall—was one that changed the cataloging landscape in the United States for good. Mobilized by petitions to the Library of Congress, missives in library journals and newsletters, and organized responses within ALA—the first program of ALA’s Task Force on Gay Liberation was called *Sex and the Single Cataloger*, a session about the trouble with headings for gay and lesbian materials (Gough 1998, 121)—librarians since the 1970s have made it their business to critically read subject headings for bias, arguing, often successfully, for changing subject headings to ameliorate bias and altering classification structures to “fix” the ideological stories told by the classification scheme. Simultaneously, LIS faculty, including Hope Olson, Ellen Greenblatt, and others, have made critical engagement with classification and subject language central to their work.

In both their activism and their scholarship, librarians have convincingly made the case that Library of Congress Classification (LCC) and Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) fail to accurately and respectfully organize library materials about social groups and identities that lack social and political power. Librarians have worked to correct incorrect classification decisions and have argued for the expansion and correction of subject headings. The critical cataloging movement has addressed the problem of bias in these structures primarily as a functional problem: materials are cataloged incorrectly, and they can be cataloged correctly with the correct pressure from activist catalogers. This project has meaningfully pointed out the trouble with classification and cataloging decisions that are framed as objective and neutral, calling attention to the fundamentally political project of sorting materials into categories and then giving those categories names.

While this work has been productive, its emphasis on correctness locates the problem of knowledge organization systems too narrowly as the domain of catalogers themselves. As a user services librarian in an academic library, my work with students has made clear the limits of this approach. Even when subject headings are updated to reflect current usage—for example, the inclusion of *Lesbian* as a heading in 1976 concurrent with the rise in lesbian visibility—they do not account for all the other words users might use to describe themselves. From the perspective of user services, the problem of inaccessible knowledge organization is one that can be productively addressed at the moment of mediated research: where librarians assist users in dialogic engagement with library access structures. An exploration of this dialogic engagement can productively shift the discussion of what to do

about LCC and LCSH from the cataloger's desk to the reference desk and the library classroom.

Queer theory provides a useful theoretical frame for rethinking the stable, fixed categories and systems of naming that characterize library knowledge organization schemes and strategies for helping users navigate them. Queer theory is distinct from lesbian and gay studies, and this distinction, while necessarily drawn in broad strokes, is helpful for understanding the potential limits of a corrective approach to classification and cataloging. Lesbian and gay studies grew out of the recognition that those identities were largely absent from the historical record. The goal was recuperative, and scholars like John Boswell (1980) and Lillian Faderman (1991) sought to locate lesbians and gays in history, where they had previously been missing. Queer theory, however, argued that this recuperative approach was dangerous. It froze identities in time and universalized them, erasing the real differences that accompany same-sex sexuality on the scales of time and place. Scholars like David Halperin (1990) and Eve Sedgwick (1990) explored how gay and lesbian identities were and are constituted in the first place. Rather than taking these identities as stable and fixed, queer theory sees these identities as shifting and contextual. Where lesbian and gay studies takes gender and sexual identities as its object of study, queer theory is interested in how those identities come discursively and socially into being and the kind of work they do in the world. Lesbian and gay studies is concerned with what homosexuality is. Queer theory is concerned with what homosexuality does.

This analytic approach locates the trouble with library classification and cataloging systems in the project of fixity itself: as we attempt to contain entire fields of knowledge or ways of being in accordance with universalizing systems and structures, we invariably cannot account for knowledges or ways of being that are excess to and discursively produced by those systems. From a queer perspective, critiques of LCC and LCSH that seek to correct them concede the terms of the knowledge organization project: that a universalizing system of organization and naming is possible and desirable.

Viewing classification and cataloging from a queer perspective—one that challenges the idea that classification and subject language can ever be corrected once and for all, outside of the context in which those decisions take on meaning—requires new ways of thinking about how to be ethically and politically engaged on behalf of marginal knowledge formations and identities who quite reasonably expect to be able to locate themselves in the library. A critical cataloging movement that locates the problem of cataloging in particular categories or subject headings invites very clear and functional solutions: librarians can lobby the Subject Authority Cooperative Program (SACO) of the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) for changes that “fix” the problem. A queer approach to classification and cataloging suggests no such easy solution. In defining the problem of classification and cataloging queerly, the solutions themselves must be queer: built to highlight and exploit the ruptures in our

classification structures and subject vocabularies, inviting resistance to rather than extension of the coherent library systems that a critical cataloging movement for correctness upholds. This shift in approach emphasizes the pedagogical possibilities of our access structures, shifting attention away from “fixing” the placement of materials in organizational systems and modifying and elaborating subject language and toward an effort that engages users in a critical reading of the catalog itself. While this might initially seem only an intellectual exercise in theorizing, the effects of such a shift in theory can be translated easily to the daily practice of helping users navigate complex information access structures. Public services librarians already engage in dialogue with users about classification and cataloging. When these interactions are informed by a queer analytic, such work shifts from one of correcting the user’s engagement with fundamentally and inextricably biased retrieval systems to one of teaching the user to engage the catalog as a complex and biased text, just as the critical catalogers do. This strategy suggests the possibility of a queer library politics that, rather than attempt to resolve the paradox of queer classification and cataloging, embraces and extends the user’s engagement with it.

### What’s Wrong with Library Knowledge Structures?

This queer analytic represents an intervention in the extensive discourse of critiques of LCC and LCSH dating from the 1970s, with work by Berman ([1971] 1993), Marshall (1972), and Foskett (1977), persisting into the present. Berman maintains “score cards” documenting changes to LCSH (Berman 2010); RADCAT, a listserv for radical catalogers maintained by K. R. Roberto, remains a popular listserv for politically motivated catalogers;<sup>1</sup> and Jenna Freedman, a zine librarian, periodically blogs about changes to LCSH.<sup>2</sup> Both practitioners and theorists have argued that library knowledge organization systems of all kinds fail to accurately and respectfully organize library materials about social groups and identities that lack social and political power. Works about religion in the Dewey Decimal System are overwhelmingly Christian (Berman [1971] 1993, 70); works about heterosexuality are barely named as such in LCSH (Christensen 2008, 233–34). As a result of these failures, biased ideological stories continue to be “told” by the organizational systems. As users interact with these structures to browse and retrieve materials, they inevitably learn negative stereotypes about race, gender, class, and other social identities. For example, they “learn” that ethnocentric myths are true, like that Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are minor religions compared to Christian monotheism. Similarly, they “learn” that heterosexuality is normative, that gay and lesbian sexuality is the only sexual identity that ought to be examined, and that queer sexuality is inherently deviant.

1. *Radical Cataloging*, listserv archives. <http://www.listserv.uga.edu/archives/radcat.html>.

2. Jenna Freedman writes on the blog Lower East Side Librarian. <http://lowereastsidelibrarian.info/taxonomy/term/139>.

Critical work around library classification and cataloging locates bias at both the structural and descriptive level: decisions about classification and classificatory language have both been sites of their critiques. Critics of biased classification argue that the placement of materials in the classification can reflect prejudice about certain identities. In some cases, they are concerned about the ideology that underlies the decision to place materials at one point in the classification instead of another. For example, locating materials about transsexuality at RC560.G45, the point in the classification schedule for *Sexual and psychosexual conditions*, suggests that transsexuality is a psychological disorder that can be remedied with treatment, rather than just another way of existing in a gendered world, or a political position, or a religious or philosophical experience (Drabinski 2009, 17). When materials about transsexuality are located elsewhere, for example, in HQ77, the emphasis on the social aspects of this identity are emphasized in ways that contradict what some users might feel are the biological or psychological causes of transsexual identity. The variable classification of two different editions of the autobiography of Christine Jorgensen provides an example of this problem. The Library of Congress assigned the 1967 edition of *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography* the class number RC560.C4 J6. The 2000 reissue from Cleis Press was assigned the number HQ77.8 J67. In both cases, the ideological bias of the classifier is revealed by the classification decision.

Additionally, critics argue that the placement of materials in relation to one another indicates bias, or a failure to represent materials about social identities correctly. Roberto has argued that the placement of materials about transsexuality adjacent to materials about gay and lesbian sexuality creates a false understanding that gender and sexuality are congruent (2011). Steve Wolf captured the outrage of 1970s queer catalogers in his 1972 contribution to *Revolt of Librarians*, an essay that called LC to task both for its homophobic classification of materials related to homosexuality, ordered under the heading *Sexual deviance* until 1972, writing: "Our dearly beloved Library of Congress until this year classed what straights call 'homosexuality' in the HQ 70's under the general heading 'Sexual deviations.' This was unbiased? Objective?? Non-judgmental?? After agitation by the cataloging sect of SRRT's Task Force on Gay Liberation, LC pulled 'Homosexuality' from the shadow of 'Sexual deviations' into the clear descriptive light of 'Sexual life'" (Wolf 1972, 39). For Wolf, categorical decisions like this one carry a weight far beyond the simple location of materials on library shelves. Their location tells an ideological story, that "homosexuality"—in quotes to suggest that the subject language is also wrong—is deviant, a behavior to be legislated, medicated, and policed. The classification decision marks LGBTQ materials as always already deviant. In all of these cases, dominant classification structures represent materials about gender and sexuality in ways that are inaccurate at best and discriminatory at worst.

Critiques of classification like these are less common than those that address bias in cataloging, or the selection and assigning of subject heading language. Subject headings are

the controlled terms that bring the classification structure to the public: they are the terms users see when they navigate our catalog and the terms our users click on to collate materials in our collections. Hope Olson and Rose Schlegl suggest that the comparative richness of subject heading critiques is directly related to their public aspect: "Subject headings are far more commonly examined than classification. This might be because the omissions and racist, sexist, xenophobic, etc., biases in subject headings are presented to us directly on the screens of our online catalogues" (2001, 66). Where subject language is central to access, classification decisions are often thought to provide "simply a shelf address," leading librarians and catalogers to "disregard the influences of context on how a work is perceived" (Olson and Schlegl 2001, 66). In simplified terms, while classification decisions might tell a story to the browser, subject-heading choices tell a story to the searcher.

Berman, the most prominent critic of subject headings, first articulated his argument in the late 1960s as a cataloger at the University of Zambia. While cataloging materials using LCSH, Berman's Zambian users informed him that using the subject heading *Kafirs* to catalog materials in the Zambian context was to use a virulent racist epithet (Gilyard 1999, 3). Useful in the US context and racist in Zambia, the problem of "Kafirs" revealed for Berman the problem with using a universal language emanating from the hegemonic white, male, Christian culture at the Library of Congress. Thus launched Berman's lifetime struggle to revise subject headings in order to ameliorate bias. His 1971 volume *Prejudices and Antipathies*, widely available in a 1993 reprint, argued famously that LCSH "can only 'satisfy' parochial, jingoistic Europeans and North Americans, white-hued, at least nominally Christian (and preferably Protestant) in faith, comfortably situated in the middle- and higher-income brackets, largely domiciled in suburbia, fundamentally loyal to the Established Order, and heavily imbued with the transcendent, incomparable glory of Western civilization" ([1971] 1993, 15). All other viewpoints and contexts that lay outside those dominant boundaries could not be represented by the existing LC list.

Berman's work was joined by catalogers like Marshall (1972), Wolf (1972), and Foskett (1977) in the 1970s and 1980s, and it was extended by Wayne Dynes and Greenblatt in their contributions to the 1990 anthology *Gay and Lesbian Library Service* (Dynes 1990; Greenblatt 1990), and then into the present by Roberto (2011) and Freedman.<sup>5</sup> Marshall (1977) argued that mainstream cataloging language was patriarchal, and she developed a thesaurus for cataloging feminist collections. In her ground-breaking piece in *Gay and Lesbian Library Service*, Greenblatt (1990) pointed to the problem of outdated subject headings for LGBT materials. Her historiographical work was updated in the second version of that title, *Serving LGBTIQ Library and Archives Users* (Greenblatt 2011), a book whose expanded acronym tells us something about the rapid changes in language around identity. Freedman writes a blog about

5. Freedman, at the blog Lower East Side Librarian.

the lack of subject headings for her institution's women of color zine collection; the poverty of relevant LCSH headings makes cataloging those zines nearly impossible.

These critics of LCC and LCSH share one core belief: classification schedules and subject headings promulgated by the Library of Congress are often wrong and should be corrected. The problem is not that cataloging happens, but that it happens incorrectly. Critical catalogers are positioned as outsiders to the cataloging process, resisting biased controlled vocabularies and fixing LCSH for the rest of us. Missing from these arguments is a reckoning with the problem of cataloging itself. Just as Library of Congress classification and cataloging decisions can be critiqued, so can the revisions suggested by critical catalogers be subject to debate. For example, in her 1972 essay for the book *Revolting Librarians*, Marshall argued against the Library of Congress's decision to add the subject heading *Mammies*, saying, "Could any of us, without mumbling embarrassed and probably useless apologies, even if we dared, tell a young, militant, Black woman who wanted material on this subject to look under MAMMIES! Why not SLAVERY IN THE U.S.—OPPRESSION OF WOMEN. OF NEGRO WOMEN—OPPRESSION?" (1972, 48). For Marshall thirty years ago, the heading *Negro women* is an improvement over the term *Mammies*; in 2012, such a term would be targeted by activist catalogers for removal.

This example points to the challenge posed by a politics of knowledge organization that seeks to "fix"—both as correction and in place—classification and cataloging decisions in library structures. Such corrections are always contingent and never final, shifting in response to discursive and political and social change. Just as *Negro women* could make political sense in 1972 but not in 2012, the corrections suggested by Benman, Freedman, and Roberto today are just as subject to the contingent vagaries of history and standpoint. Such work often fails to acknowledge such contingency: Benman writes of LCC and LCSH that "there can be no quarrel about . . . its value as a global standardizing agent, a means for achieving some uniformity in an area that would otherwise be chaotic. . . . Knowledge and scholarship are, after all, universal" ([1971] 1993, 15). His conclusion, shared by a generation of catalogers who have seen their role as corrective agents, reiterates an approach to classification and cataloging that elides contingency as a factor in determining what classification and cataloging decisions are imagined to be correct in any given context. Taking into account such contingency requires theorizing the trouble with classification and cataloging in library knowledge systems as at the root rather than along the branches.

Queer theory offers a useful analytic for developing such a critique. Queer theory has its roots in disruption of, rather than assimilation to, norms of identity. Politically, queer emerged as part of a political movement of gender and sexual minorities in the 1960s. Distinct from mainstream lesbian and gay movements, groups like Queer Nation resisted assimilationist strategies that sought rights on the basis of stable and unchanging identities. Queer theory also found roots in a postmodernism that challenged the idea that truth could

be final. For queer theory, knowledge—both of the self and about the world—is understood to be discursively produced, socially powerful, and always already undergoing revision. Queer theory resists the idea that stable identities like lesbian or gay exist outside of time. Rather, these identities exist only temporarily in social and political contexts that both produce and require them. Queer theory sees claims to universal and unchanging identities as both unattainable and undesirable, particularly in the sense that they elide the social power of uncontested claims to truth. In the library context, queer theories can refocus attention away from the project of producing “correct” knowledge organization systems, pointing toward a project of dialogic pedagogical interventions that push all users to consider how the organization of, and access to, knowledge is politically and socially produced.

### Queer Critique of Classification and Cataloging

When queer theoretical claims about the instability of identity categories come into contact with the knowledge organization project, the trouble with correction becomes quite clear. Grant Campbell (2000) and Patrick Keilty (2009) have taken up the issue from historical and literary perspectives on queerness, while Emily Drabinski has explored the queer challenge to library classification and cataloging in explicitly spatial terms (2009). The entire project of library classification and cataloging is at odds with queer ideas about historicity, contingency, and the impossibility of a fixed system of linguistic signs that would contain identities that are always already relational and contingent. A queer perspective on classification structures sees categories as discursively produced and historically contingent rather than as essential or articulable once and for all. A queer approach to language resists the idea that naming is ever outside of power or resistance. In both cases, the project of a critical library classification becomes less about correction and more about locating the ruptures in the structure, developing what Olson has called “techniques for making the limits of our existing information systems permeable” (2001a, 20).

Library classification structures like LCC consist of categories that appear—to the cataloger and to the user—to be objective and unbiased. Indeed, mainstream cataloging literature removes the biased mind of the human cataloger from the system altogether, insisting that categories are derived from the literature itself: the cataloger responds to literary warrant, building citation order and naming systems out of the literature of a specific discipline (Olson 2001b, 118). Similarly, both mainstream and critical catalogers contend that subject cataloging language is (in the case of the central authority at the Library of Congress) or should be (according to Berman, Foskett, Greenblatt, and others) objective and unbiased, based on David Haykin’s first principle of subject description: “the heading, in wording and structure, should be that which the reader will seek in the catalog” (1951, 7, emphasis added). The demand that classification and cataloging should be unified and representative systems, responsive to

text and user, is conceptually shared by mainstream and alternative catalogers. The political disagreement only has to do with who ought to determine what those systems should be. As Campbell has put it, the work of Berman and others depends on a faith that bias in library classification and cataloging systems “can be alleviated by being more enlightened, and responding more quickly to the suggestions of enlightened people” (2000, 129).

Queer theory invites a divergent interpretation, focusing on the ways these unified systems are produced—within LC and via resistance to LC—and what effect those categorizations and naming conventions have on access to materials. For queer theory, systems of categorization and naming are inextricable from the historical contingencies of their own production; there can be no “correct” categorical or linguistic structures, only those that discursively emerge and circulate in a particular context. For example, efforts to fix gay sexuality under the category of *Sexual life* rather than *Sexual deviance* do not secure truth, but simply reveal the process through which these categories and knowledge about them are produced. The categorical change does not reveal the emergence of an eternal, unchanging truth about gay sexuality, but describes a discursive arc through the history of the knowledge organization structure itself.

A queer analysis intervenes in this shared discourse and offers a way to reconsider such systems as always already biased, remedied not by correctness once and for all but engaged as a site of productive resistance. For queer theory, knowledge organization structures are productive, not merely representative. They do not smoothly represent reality, but discursively produce it, constituting the field of potential identities users can either claim as true and authentic representations of themselves or resist as not quite correct. From this perspective, for example, subject headings that represent the language of the normalized cataloger—who always gets such language wrong—are as important to the production of queer identities as subject headings that, generated by queer-identified people, would purport to be correct. Indeed, as Keilty has suggested, the normalized and stabilized language of controlled library vocabularies are in fact required for the production of other identities. He writes: “Queer necessarily relies on normalized and stabilized boundaries to exist, not only because queer itself is a category with limits—it is whatever normal sex and desire is not, that which does not belong, as normality changes over time—but also because queer transgresses those boundaries. Queer’s non-normativity relies on norms as a precondition, and is therefore defined in relation to its opposite” (Keilty 2009, 242). “Incorrect” subject headings, or subject headings that reflect a normative view of minority identities and knowledges, are both unavoidable and necessary for the emergence of “correct” subject headings, which are always produced in resistance to normative vocabularies. If queerness is seen as contingent and contextual, any subject heading entered into the controlled vocabulary is inaugurated into the norm, and therefore is just as subject to critique and revision as the headings that they correct and replace. No matter which name is fixed—whether *Homosexuality* or *Gay men* or *Lesbians*—other identities will emerge at the boundaries of what can be contained by this language.

Central to queer claims about structures of identity is this idea that such structures are always already in motion, contingent, and subject to change. From the standpoint of a queer analytic, then, classification and controlled vocabularies are always sites of struggle, both necessary in order to come into being (I need the word “lesbian” in order to articulate myself as different from the norm, just as I need the subject heading *Lesbian* to locate books about myself in the OPAC) and subject to intense debate and resistance (and yet I am not entirely a lesbian, in fact I am something even more different than that; *Lesbian* should be replaced by *Dyke* because that is the vernacular I use to describe myself). This is the heart of the very queer struggle to come into being through a language that is always already exceeded by the subject who claims it: “The individual subject can’t quite either be or not be in the collective category, can’t coincide with it or easily escape it” (Riley 2000, 85). It is not a problem of finally determining the correct word that will describe myself; any such decision simply inaugurates the play of resistance all over again. In this sense, library classification and cataloging productively provide a field of context against which I can describe myself both in terms of identity and resistance.

Ideas about the contingency of knowledge and language can be rooted in the work of Michel Foucault, a foundational queer theorist who argues that knowledge, rather than being a thing that exists abstractly to be grasped and represented, is in fact produced by discourses and anchored in time. We do not discover knowledge: we create knowledge through discourse. Truth claims, including the claim that an individual is insane (*Madness and Civilization*), sexually deviant (*History of Sexuality: Volume 1*), or a criminal (*Discipline and Punish*) are simply reflections of the work of politics and language. What is relevant in our efforts to understand these categorizations is not the content of individual categories of knowledge or identity—what a person does or says that makes her insane—but the mechanisms and workings of power through which those categories are constructed and then used to produce material social effects. As Foucault writes in his preface to *Madness and Civilization*, “madness and non-madness, reason and non-reason are inextricably involved: inseparable at the moment when they do not yet exist, and existing for each other, in relation to each other, in the exchange which separates them” (1988, x). Each category of identity relies on the other for its stability, and each is the product of the circulation of the two through a discursive field. Foucault’s genealogical method demonstrates the ways that categories—of identity and of knowledge—are inextricable from the time and place that produced them and the discursive process by which they come into being and begin to bear the weight of social and political meaning.

Further, the discursive construction of categories means that categories produce each other: once a social category comes into being, it makes space in a field for the articulation of other categories. Judith Butler describes the ways that categories produce other categories as we lay claim to them, always producing an other, or outside, that is as fundamental to

the identity as the characteristics that inhere in it. A claim to identity always relies on the production of an identity category that simply *is not what I am*. Butler uses the example of claiming lesbian identity to describe how this simultaneous production of self and other works: "To claim that this is what I am is to suggest a provisional totalization of this 'L.' But if the I can so determine itself, then that which it excludes in order to make that determination remains constitutive of the determination itself" (Butler 1991, 15). In other words, sexual identity categories—and the names that enter them into linguistic social life—are always reliant on the presence of an outside or an other without which the category cannot exist: in order for the category of lesbian to exist, everything that is not-lesbian must also exist. Categories are not mutually exclusive, but mutually contingent, a way of thinking about boundaries that challenges the assumptions of exclusivity that lie at the foundation of library classification and cataloging practice.

These queer theoretical perspectives on classification and cataloging challenge the idea that a stable, universal, objective knowledge organization system could even exist; there is no such thing if categories and names are always contingent and in motion. Movements to correct classification and cataloging are therefore simply examples of instances of categorical production, doing the same kind of work that LC classification and cataloging decisions do, and just as subject to critique from different contingent positions. The discursive interventions represented by Berman and others perform what Olson calls "the important first step" of revealing through resistance the hegemonic system of ordering and standardized naming in LC (2001a, 21). They do not, however, change or challenge the hegemonic fantasy that lies at the heart of the knowledge organization project in the first place.

In fact, the political focus on correcting classification structure and subject language solidifies the idea that the classification structure is in fact objective and does in fact tell the truth, the core fictions—from a queer perspective—that allow the hegemony of a universalized classification structure to persist. When gay and lesbian materials are classified under *Sexual deviance*, the knowledge organization structure tells one kind of true story: gay men and lesbians are sexually deviant, a dominant ideological truth reflected in, for example, the systematic denial to gay men and lesbians of the social goods acquired by those with normative sexuality through marriage. A user confronting the perhaps initially shocking and upsetting placement of materials here could, with the deployment of technical and human resources, be encouraged to think critically about the classification and cataloging structure; after all, if LC thinks about gay men and lesbians this way, what else does it get terribly, consequentially wrong? Such incorrectness reveals ruptures in the otherwise seamless objectivity that the classification pretends to. Erasing the rupture, smoothing it over through Wolf's intervention and those that might follow in the contingent future, erases the evidence of dominant ideology and the resistance to it that are essential components of the classification and cataloging project. An emphasis on correctness and revision precludes inter-

ventions that acknowledge and strategically deploy this analysis, an analysis that might productively engage users in their own critical engagement with OPACs and, by extension, other systems of linguistic discipline. In the final section of this article, I turn to a discussion of what these queer interventions might be.

### Queer Interventions

The way a problem is defined has much to do with the solutions offered. When a problem is defined functionally, the proposed solutions will be functional. If bias in library classification and cataloging is merely a problem of failing to get things functionally correct, then the political solution will be to set things so: lobbying the Library of Congress to correct classification schedules and subject headings to reflect the truth. But if library classification and cataloging is seen as a coextensive process of identity representation as well as the production of identities, then such functional solutions begin to make less sense. A queer theoretical approach calls instead for queer solutions: shifts in analytical approach that take seriously the contingency of these apparently stable structures. If contingency is axiomatic for our understanding of library knowledge structures, then our interventions cannot undo or erase that contingency. Instead, they should highlight and make visible the fundamental paradoxes of classification and cataloging from a queer perspective: in order to be accessible to users, materials must be fixed in place and described using controlled vocabulary. However, this fixing is always fundamentally fictive; classification and subject heading decisions are always made in a context that is subject to change. Queer interventions will highlight and make visible the contingency of cataloging decisions.

The politics of correction advanced by Berman and others smooths out the ruptures in the catalog that lay bare its contingencies, rendering the constructed quality of library classification and cataloging less visible to the user and, therefore, more difficult to apprehend and understand. When a user encounters an obviously biased classification decision or subject heading, the fact that the library knowledge organization structure emerges from an ideological perspective becomes easy to see. If gay and lesbian sexuality is classified as *Sexual deviance*, a user—especially a gay or lesbian user—can very quickly understand that catalogs reflect a particular point of view rather than an objective truth; such a categorization offends, and therefore becomes a site of resistance that can extend beyond the catalog itself. If, after all, such a categorization reflects a truth about the world (and in a time where gay men and lesbians continue to struggle for equal access to public rights like marriage), the library classification scheme can be seen as a productive site of truth-telling about the larger political world.

Contemporary cataloging activists respond to such ruptures of the apparent objectivity of library classification and cataloging with functional solutions: Berman continues to lobby the Library of Congress for changes, documenting his work on his website; Greenblatt

argues that corrected headings are critical to the work of library catalogers, and she advocates for expanded “funnels,” cooperative structures for organizing petitions to SACO for new and revised headings (2011, 222); Freedman posts updates from her own and others’ efforts to fix and LCSH on her blog, Lower East Side Librarian. These efforts have met with success, particularly in the area of modifying subject headings. In a 2003 study, Steven Knowlton found that 39 percent of Berman’s suggested LCSH changes in *Prejudices and Antipathies* had been accepted as proposed by the Library of Congress, while an additional 24 percent were altered to take into account his concerns (2005, 127–28). Greenblatt’s suggested changes to sexuality headings in her 1990 contribution to *Gay and Lesbian Library Services* have all been adopted (2011, 219).

While this work represents a critical disruption to the smooth hegemony of LCC and LCSH for librarians and scholars who engage in these activist projects, it erases that disruption in OPACs for users. Such work has the unintended effect of implicitly affirming the possibility that library classification and cataloging could be done correctly, once and for all, and outside of discourse or ideology. As Olson has suggested, this discursive work is “the important first step” in a project that “identif[ies] the limits” of classification systems (2001a, 21), but it cannot be where critical engagement with classification and cataloging ends. Instead, queer interventions can start at the same place—where the ideology of the knowledge organization structure is apparent, and therefore where the contingency of classification and subject description are most obvious—and inaugurate users into the same dialogue with the structure that Berman and others engage. Such work would, as Olson, has suggested, begin to “conceiv[e] ways to create breaches in the limit” (2001a, 21).

Rather than placing a correction at that exposed limit, a queer analysis suggests interventions that highlight that limit and invite the user to grapple with it. Information studies scholars and practitioners have suggested technical approaches to exploit the points where classification and subject headings founder on the shores of difference. Olson has suggested designing search interfaces that make related and broader terms visible to users so that they can understand how materials are linked in the knowledge organization scheme, as well as systems that allow users to enhance subject description through user tagging and mapping local thesauri to universally applied subject headings (2007, 533). In other work, Olson offers additional technological solutions, all of them locally applied, acknowledging the contingency of place: using local language in MARC records, exploiting notations to gather locally important materials, developing alternative local classification and cataloging systems built out of alternative thesauri, and varying citation order in order to vary the hierarchy of samenesses (Olson 2001b, 120–21). These technological approaches reveal points in the classification structure “through which the power may leak out” (Olson 2001a, 22), making apparent the otherwise invisible constructedness of classification and cataloging schemes.

Another compelling strategy lies in exploiting the ground laid by queer theory for understanding classification structure and subject language as discursively produced and inviting users into that discourse in the moment of encounter with our OPACs. This emphasis on the dialogical is apparent in some proposed technical solutions; user tagging, for example, makes material the stake users have in designing subject vocabularies. Discursive engagement is also a hallmark of public services librarianship: librarians meet users at the reference desk or in the library instruction classroom, teaching users how to navigate library knowledge organization structures. A queerly informed teaching librarian has the potential to transform these moments in the library use process into another point where the ruptures of classification and cataloging structures can be productively pulled apart to help users understand the bias of hegemonic schemes. For example, a user seeking information about identities that are not listed in LCSH but related to identities that are named—for example, *genderqueer* versus *transsexuality*, or *aggressive* versus *lesbian*—could be led to the general point in the classification where related materials could be found and engaged in a discussion of why the knowledge they come seeking by name is invisible in the structure. Such a reference interaction would both usefully direct the student to relevant materials and exploit the contextual clues offered by LCSH. Librarians who are themselves engaged with a queer approach to knowledge organization can teach the user how to understand what she sees when she searches the OPAC—and what she does not see—as directly related to the structure of the knowledge organization system she searches against.

Defining the problem of biased classification and cataloging as queer and analytic shifts the burden of engaging and struggling with that bias from catalogers to reference and instruction librarians working with patrons at the desk or in the classroom. Indeed, since the advent of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, teaching students to critically engage information sources is a critical part of the contemporary work of public services librarians: “The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system” (ACRL 2004). A queer approach to instruction would shift from simply teaching the user to navigate LCC and LCSH to a focus on dialogue with patrons that will help them tell the troubles of those schemes. Users can be invited into the discursive work of both using and resisting standard schemes, developing a capacity for critical reflection about subject language and classification structure. *Why don't I see myself in the subject vocabulary, and what does this tell me about the other ways I feel invisible?* This critical reflection—central to the work of Berman, Greenblatt, Foskett, Freedman, and others—can be encouraged in the work of our students as they are invited into dialogue, and not merely compliance, with the disciplining systems of the library. As Keilty has suggested, “correcting the hazards of classifying queer phenomena occurs not only when the structures of categorization are made permeable, but also when

scholars, practitioners, and activists form a critical engagement congruent with queer's intrinsic resistance to classification" (2009, 244). The work of correction therefore gives way to the work of building and expanding such engagement.

It is easier to imagine points of entry into critically teaching classification and controlled vocabularies if offensive subject divisions and subject language remain uncorrected. This is, after all, what inaugurated Berman's own political project: the shocking rupture of the apparent objectivity of the library classification structure occasioned by seeing "Kafir" in a Zambian context. The project of systematically removing evidence of bias from library structures makes that shock rarer for students to encounter and more difficult to demonstrate across the reference desk or in the classroom. A queer approach to the problem of library classification and cataloging demands that these reflections of ideology be left as remnants in the structure and that librarians be prepared to teach students how to read what they discover in the text that is the knowledge organization system itself.

Turning library access structures into pedagogical tools allows librarians to teach knowledge production as a contested project, one in which they themselves can engage. In her work on using Wikipedia in the library instruction classroom, Heidi L. M. Jacobs calls this "teaching the conflicts" (2010, 186), asking students to read Wikipedia not for the truth value of its explanations but for evidence of struggle over the right to tell the truth evidenced in the website's Talk pages. In the context of library cataloging, students might be asked to examine headings related to women in LCSH side-by-side with Marshall's *On Equal Terms* and to reflect on the assumptions that underlie each term. Greenblatt's historical study of LGBTIQ headings might be productively read next to Wolf's incendiary—and male-focused—activist texts from the early 1970s, and both could be read next to the current LCC and LCSH schedules for materials related to gay and lesbian sexuality. Classification structures and controlled vocabularies are thus introduced as contested and in flux rather than stable and objective, inviting users to engage with them critically on their own behalf. This approach asks users to begin to understand how structures and linguistic forms make certain ways of knowing and being articulable and therefore possible, a very queer goal indeed.

### Conclusion

The problems of bias in library classification structures and subject language are, from a queer perspective, problems endemic to the knowledge organization project itself. If social categories and names are understood as embedded in contingencies of space, time, and discourse, then bias is inextricable from the process of classification and cataloging. When an item is placed in a particular category or given a particular name, those decisions always reflect a particular ideology or approach to understanding the material itself. This fundamental insight challenges the traditional approach of activist librarians who see as paramount the task of correcting classification and cataloging schemes until they become unbiased and universally

accessible structures. Such a project contains an inherent tension: correction can mask the inescapable contested ideological work performed by catalogers who must make these decisions every day.

Approaching the problem of library classification and cataloging from a queer perspective demands that we leave intact the traces of historicity and ideology that mar the classification and cataloging project. Such traces can reveal the limit of the universal knowledge organization project, inviting technical interventions that highlight the constructed nature of classification structures and controlled vocabularies. These traces also represent moments when the burden of undoing the hegemony of library classification and cataloging shifts from the back office to the reference desk and classroom, where public service librarians can intervene and emphasize the discursivity of classification and cataloging by engaging in critical reflection with users about what they do and do not see in the library catalog.

Queer theory challenges us to interrogate the processes and power relations that produce certain ways of knowing and being as correct and others as wrong, deviant, and less worthy of life. When brought into conversation with the literature of critical library classification and cataloging practice, queer theory informs new strategies for teaching the library catalog from a queer perspective. Beyond this narrow intervention, however, such an engagement offers other disciplines material ways to think and teach about discourses of power. Structures of power are often abstract and difficult to perceive or explain to students as real. For example, considered against the background of a dominant fantasy of equal opportunity, explaining the ways that choices and life chances are produced by mechanisms that precede the subject can be difficult. A queer reading of LCC and LCSH offers a concrete way of understanding the way these mechanisms work in time. The ideology that consigns gay and lesbian sexuality to the subject classification for *Sexual deviance*, or classifies sexuality of all kinds as *Social problems*, has ramifications beyond the library catalog for people who claim those identities. The text of the library classification and cataloging structure enables us to apprehend these ideologies directly off the page.

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Globalization  
Minority women  
Stereotypes (Social psychology) in fashion  
Women, Black  
United States

students' as agents of change both inside the library and out.

Full screen 



# Queer Browsing and the Library of Congress Subject Headings: Can user-generated tags enhance subject access to LGBTQ+ material?

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## Abstract

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Within the field of Library and Information science, the treatment of LGBTQ+ topics in the Library of Congress subject headings is an emerging concern. Although changes have been implemented to the subject headings throughout the years, the hierarchical, oppositional nature of the system undoubtedly promotes heteronormative ideals. Moreover, the focus on uniformity and literary warrant means that 'niche' or non-dominant LGBTQ+ topics are often limited or obscured. The concept of adding user-tags into library catalogues has been popularised as a possible alternative. Due to this, there are an emerging number of tools that allow user-tags to be implemented as an overlay feature. This study aims to provide a comparison of Library of Congress' subject headings and user-tags created by LibraryThing web users. To achieve this, a small pool of LGBTQ+ identifying participants were asked to complete a survey-based task to determine which terms they would use when searching for LGBTQ+ material. The participant terms were then compared with the terms that emerged within the user-tags and subject headings. Within the user-tags and participant data there was a high frequency of terms relating to "queer" identity and underrepresented LGBTQ+ groups, which were absent from the subject headings. However, the data also showed that the Library of Congress subject headings matched more of the participant given terms relating to intersectional LGBTQ+ issues. Due to their oppositional strengths and weaknesses, the research concludes that implementing user-tags to library catalogues is likely to enhance subject access to LGBTQ+ material, as long as it is implemented alongside the subject headings and does not replace them. This research is considered an exploratory study and results cannot be generalised.

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## Introduction

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### Background

The Library of Congress subject headings (LCSH), first introduced in 1909 to organise Library of Congress' own collection, has since become the most widely used subject heading list in the world (Broughton, 2006:103). As catalogues have become available digitally, the popularity of LCSH has grown, necessitated by an increasing need for digital metadata. LCSH has little competition, the only other significant set of subject headings being Sears' *'List of subject headings for a small library.'* (Broughton, 2006:103). Despite this, LCSH has faced significant criticism from Library and Information Science scholars throughout the years, with many questioning whether there may be a better alternative system. The majority of this criticism surrounds the way in which LCSH describes "groups of people" (Knowlton, 2005:124). Olson (2000, 2001) has been openly critical of the way in which gender has been treated in LCSH throughout the years. However, many other cultural biases have been noted, and it is largely argued that LCSH replicates society's perceived biases, hierarchically opposing 'otherness' against male, white, cisgender, heterosexual, and patriarchal norms. Based on a set of rules created by Charles Cutter in 1876, LCSH is focussed on unity, usage, and the reader as the focus (Chan, 1995:7). Terms represented within the catalogue are only able to exist if there is sufficient literary warrant, language must be kept as simple and uniform as possible, and subject headings should reflect the language of the "average reader" (Knowlton, 2005:124). Many of these principles limit the way in which LGBTQ+ topics can be represented within LCSH, which may mean that LGBTQ+ patrons or individuals searching for LGBTQ+ topics struggle with subject access.

Clarke and Schoonmaker's (2019:174) study examining LGBTQ+ information needs concluded that LGBTQ+ patrons have significant trouble accessing material, often due to a lack of descriptive metadata. LCSH's focus on unity and uniformity means that LGBTQ+ topics are limited. Each concept or idea should only have one subject heading attached to it to ensure that all material relating to that topic is accessible under the same heading. Concepts of gender and sexuality are often not so easy to box-in and define, therefore, 'niche' identities, "queer" identities, and fluid identities are underrepresented within LCSH. Improvements have been made to LCSH throughout the years, and due to the campaigning

and petitioning of prominent library activists throughout the years, LGBTQ+ subject access has undoubtedly improved. Prior to the year 1972, the term “Homosexuality” was cross-referenced with the term “Sexual perversion” (Adler, 2015:487) and until 2007, the term “Transgenderism” only existed as a see-also reference to “Transsexualism” (Johnson, 2009:666). Therefore, it must be noted, that significant changes have been made. However, scholars note persisting issues, such as the lack of terms describing “queerness” and “drag” performance (Adler, 2009, 2013; Bates and Rowley, 2011; Drabinski, 2013; Edge, 2019; Roberto, 2011) as well as the hierarchical structures that place minorities in the margin (Bates and Rowley, 2011; Christensen, 2008; Drabinski, 2013; Olson, 2000, 2001).

User-tagging (also known as ‘social tagging’) is often posited within the literature as a possible alternative to traditional cataloguing methods (Adler, 2009, 2013; Bates and Rowley, 2011; Drabinski, 2013; Gerolimos, 2009; Lu et al., 2010; Murphy & Rafferty, 2015; Pirmann, 2012; Rolla, 2009; Steele, 2008). User-tagging offers more flexibility than LCSH as multiple terms with the same, or similar, referents are able to exist in the catalogue at once. Tagging also encourages user participation, therefore, the likelihood and opportunity for LGBTQ+ community members to name themselves is increased. However, the use of “personal” tagging (Golder and Huberman, 2006) and a lack of synonym, homograph and homonym control (Thomas et al., 2009) within user-tagging systems has caused many scholars to raise concerns about its ability to enhance library catalogues (Samanta & Rath, 2019; Steele, 2008; Thomas et al., 2009; Watson, 2020). LibraryThing’s (LT) tagging system is usually the folksonomy that is contrasted to LCSH, and several comparison and usability studies have been undertaken within this domain (Adler, 2009; Bates & Rowley, 2011; Lu et al., 2010; Primann, 2012; Rolla, 2009). However, further exploration is necessary to better understand how both LCSH and user-tags deal with LGBTQ+ topics and how well each system allows LGBTQ+ patrons to meet their information needs and gain access to important topics.

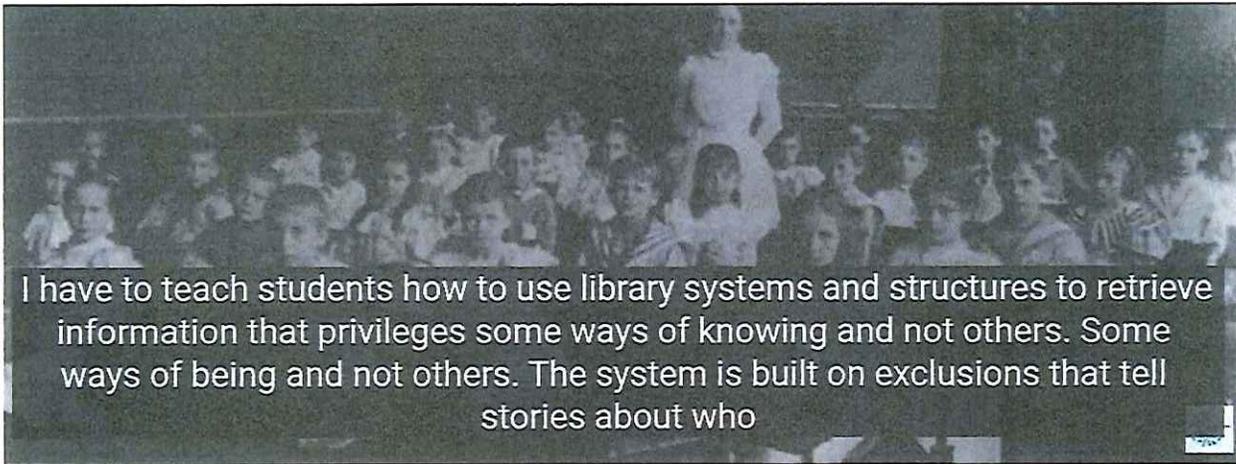
### **Abbreviations, Initialisms and Definitions**

- LCSH: The Library of Congress Subject Headings
- LC: Library of Congress
- OPAC: Online Public Access Catalogue
- The initialism LGBTQ+ will be used to describe any gender or sexual identity that does not fit within a heteronormative framework.

- Heteronormative: [Adjective] *“Denoting or relating to a world view that promotes heterosexuality as the normal of preferred sexual orientation”* – Oxford University Press, 2020a.
- “Transgender” and “Trans\*” will be used throughout the study. “Transgender” will be used to describe individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. “Trans\*”, however, will be used to describe any gender identity that does not fit within a heteronormative framework – which may not necessarily come under the “Transgender” umbrella.
- The term “queer” will be used throughout the study. This term is not intended to be used pejoratively.
  - Queer: [Adjective] *“Denoting or relating to a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms.”* – Oxford University Press, 2020b.

## Research Focus

In order to determine whether user-tags can enhance subject access to LGBTQ+ material, an extensive literature review and a qualitative survey-based task will be carried out as the project’s research methods. This study is, therefore, considered mixed method. Within the literature review, key themes will be identified to present a narratological argument. In the first chapter, an historical analysis of LCSH will be performed which will identify the key issues that have been noted within the literature, as well as any efforts to amend issues throughout the years. The second chapter will examine the concept of queer theory, as well as linguistic determinism. In this chapter, the ideas of scholars who claim that LCSH, and even cataloguing in general, is fundamentally corrupt will be explored. By looking at these concepts and ideas, the necessity for an alternative, ‘looser’ method of subject searching will emerge. User-tags will therefore be suggested as a possible alternative in the third chapter of the literature review. In this, the possible advantages and disadvantages of implementing folksonomies into library catalogues will be explored with reference to similar comparative and usability studies. One could, quite reasonably, come to conclusion from the literature review alone. However, further research was deemed necessary to contribute new ideas to the field.

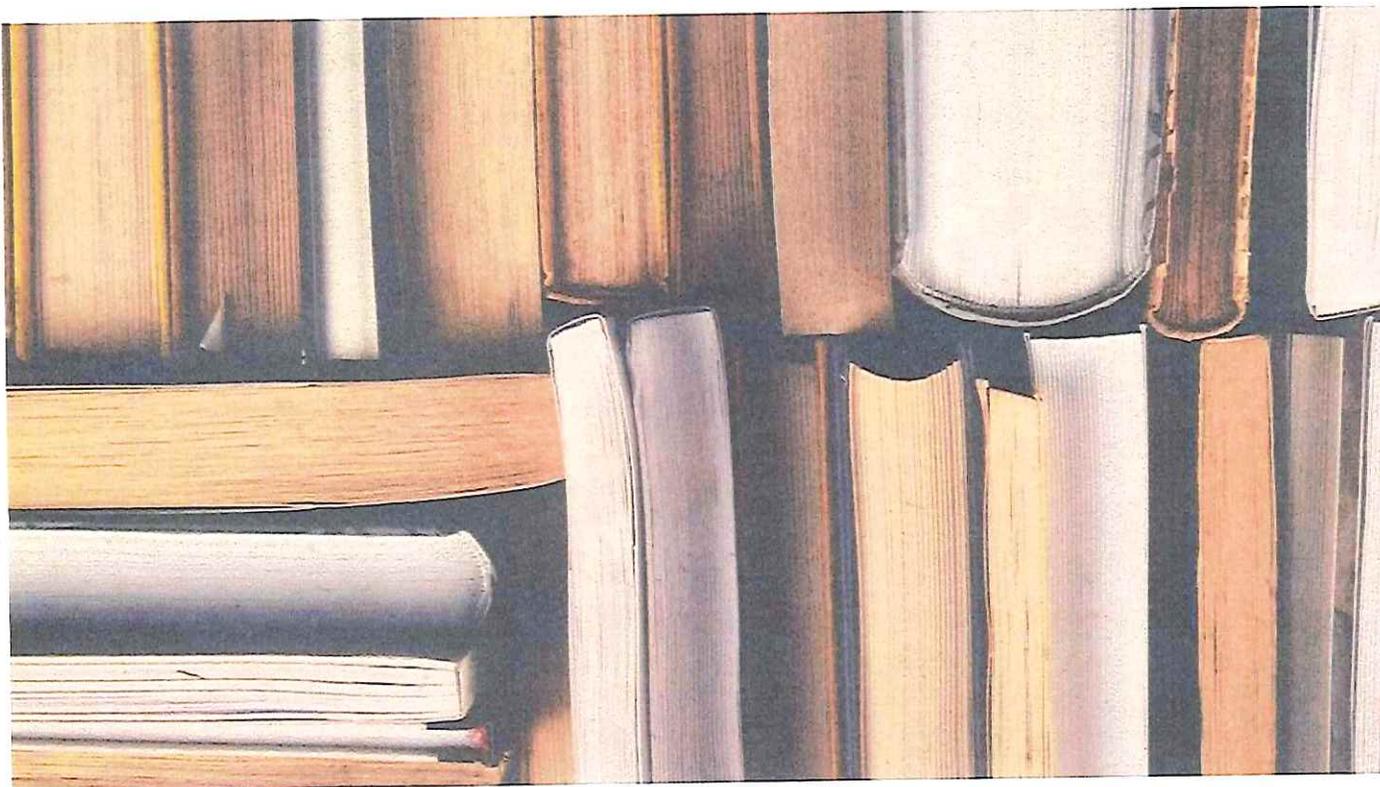


I have to teach students how to use library systems and structures to retrieve information that privileges some ways of knowing and not others. Some ways of being and not others. The system is built on exclusions that tell stories about who



## BOOKS

## American Library Assn. strips name of Dewey Decimal System creator from annual award



The ALA council made the decision on Sunday approving a resolution that urged the award be renamed because Melvil Dewey, the creator of the Dewey Decimal System, had a history of anti-Semitism, racism against African Americans and sexual harassment of women. (stevanovicigor / Getty Images/iStockphoto)

BY MICHAEL SCHAUB

JUNE 26, 2019 1:06 PM PT

The governing body of the American Library Assn. voted to remove the name of Melvil Dewey, the creator of the Dewey Decimal System, from one of its annual awards.

The ALA council made the decision on Sunday, [reports Publisher's Weekly](#), approving a resolution that urged the award be renamed because of Dewey's history of anti-Semitism,

racism against African Americans and sexual harassment of women. The initial resolution was advanced by ALA members during the organization's annual conference. The resolution argued that the Melvil Dewey Medal be renamed because "Dewey did not permit Jewish people, African Americans, or other minorities admittance to the resort owned by Dewey and his wife," which led to his censure by the New York State Board of Regents.

[Book lovers! Sign up for the new L.A. Times Book Club for upcoming author events »](#)

Additionally, the resolution states, "Dewey made numerous inappropriate physical advances toward women he worked with and wielded professional power over," and his behavior led him to be "ostracized from the organization for decades." Dewey was one of the co-founders of the ALA, and served as the organization's president from 1890 to 1891, and again from 1892 to 1893. He's most famous for inventing the Dewey Decimal Classification system, which is still widely used in libraries around the world. He was also the founder of the Lake Placid Club, a social club for educators which refused entry to Jewish people and people of color. Objections to the club's policies led to Dewey resigning his post as New York State Librarian in 1899. Dewey was also frequently accused of sexual harassment.

In a [2014 article for American Libraries Magazine](#), Wayne A. Wiegand writes that Dewey "made unwelcome advances on four prominent librarians" at an ALA event, which led to his ostracization from the group.

The Melvil Dewey Medal is awarded annually by the ALA to a person who displays "creative leadership of high order, particularly in those fields in which Melvil Dewey was actively interested: library management, library training, cataloging and classification, and the tools and techniques of librarianship," [according to the organization's website](#).

Past winners of the award include Carla Hayden, the Librarian of Congress, [who was given the prize in 2017](#).

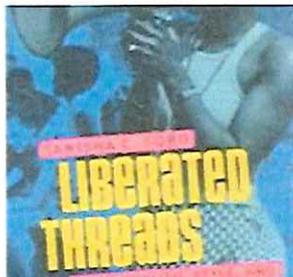
Emily Drabinski, a New York City librarian who attended the ALA meeting on Sunday, [said](#)

[the council passed the resolution](#) to change the name of the award “overwhelmingly with no debate.”

ADVERTISEMENT

This is the second time in a year that the ALA has decided to strip the name of a controversial figure from one of its awards. Last June, the organization [changed the name of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal](#) to the Children’s Literature Legacy Award. That change came after members raised concerns about the “Little House on the Prairie” author’s “stereotypical attitudes” toward African Americans and Native Americans.

Publishers Weekly reports that the ALA has not decided what to rename the Melvil Dewey Medal.



Feminine beauty (Aesthetics) -- United States  
Beauty, Personal -- United States  
Stereotypes (Social psychology) in fashion -- United States  
Globalization -- United States  
Beauty, Personal  
Feminine beauty (Aesthetics)  
Globalization  
Minority women  
Stereotypes (Social psychology) in fashion --  
Women, Black  
United States

If we bring to our teaching of information skills, of information literacy, an analysis of structural power and how it relates to information organization and retrieval, what and how we teach is fundamentally different.

## Questioning Authority

### *Changing Library Cataloging Standards to Be More Inclusive to a Gender Identity Spectrum*

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AMBER BILLEY and EMILY DRABINSKI

**Abstract** When a library adds a book to its collection, it adds a surrogate record for that book in the library's catalog. To get this record the library will either download it or create a record for the book from an international bibliographic record database. Authors have records too. These are known as *name authority records*. Recently the standards for creating these records changed to allow library catalogers to record more personal information about authors in authority records. This includes information about gender. There began a collective effort by a handful of catalogers to revise the new instructions so that binary gender was not encoded into the metadata of library records. This paper outlines the developments, results, and implications of this work.

**Keywords** library catalog, gender identity, metadata, bibliographic record data

Libraries use metadata schemes to describe and organize materials in order to facilitate access. This is foundational to—and inextricable from—the library project. Without classification and cataloging schemes, books would simply be in a pile; each time a user wanted to retrieve a particular book or books on a particular topic or by a particular author, they would have to sort through the pile at random. Metadata—data that describes the book in a number of different ways—makes it possible to search more precisely. When users enter a title or author into an online library catalog, they are using metadata to pull a book from the middle of the stack. These structures also enable serendipitous browsing. They describe individual titles, but also build syndetic relationships between them, collating like with like on library shelves so that readers who locate one book about the history of transgender identities will find all the others on the same shelf.

When a library adds a book to its collection, it adds a surrogate record for that book in the library's catalog. To get this record, the library will either download it or create a record for the book from an international bibliographic record database. Authors have records too. These are known as “name authority records.”

An accumulation of authority records in a single database is called an “authority file.” The most widely used authority file in the United States is the Library of Congress Name Authority File (LCNAF). Library catalogers create new name authority records for all new authors and contribute those records to an international authority record database.

Metadata also ensures the maintenance of difference, preserving the boundaries between items that are like each other in some way but not identical. For example, two books might share the same title, or two authors might share the same name. “Authority control” is a term used in library science to describe the process of ensuring that every author in a library’s collection is uniquely recorded in the catalog and disambiguated from authors with similar names. Authority control determines how we tell one author (e.g., Smith, Jane) from another (e.g., Smith, Jane, 1982–) in the library catalog by establishing parameters for the creation of authority records to contain a unique primary name for every author.

While these systems are necessary to enable access to materials in library collections, they are also subject to critique. Ostensibly objective and simply descriptive, all knowledge organization schemes reflect the ideologies from which they emerge. For example, the Library of Congress Classification shelves materials about bestiality near those about transgender people, and shelve both under a broad umbrella of deviant lifestyles. What might seem a set of category errors to individuals from these communities is embedded in the system and on the shelves as uncontested reality. In turn, the system reproduces those assumptions about the way the world works as patrons browse shelves and catalogers describe books. This has implications for trans people who are marked as *similar to* and *different from* on shelves and in the dominant systems that organize people and things in information environments around the world. Activist catalogers have worked to change the ways that materials by trans authors and about trans experience are represented in these settings.

### An Evolution of Library Cataloging Standards

For more than 175 years, libraries have followed fairly straightforward sets of standards and instructions to create descriptions of the books and other resources held in their collections, as well as rules on how to record information about authors, subject headings, and assign classification numbers. A brief (and incomplete) history is as follows: Antonio Panizzi issued his *91 Rules* for cataloging the books at the British Museum (now the British Library) in 1841. Charles Ammi Cutter published his *Rules for a Dictionary Catalog* in 1876. The American Library Association published their *Condensed Rules for an Author and Title Catalog* in 1904. The *Paris Principles* from the 1961 International Conference on Cataloging

Principles outlined the functions and structure of a library catalog (International Federation of Library Associations 1961). The first edition of the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* was published in 1966 jointly by the American Library Association, the Canadian Library Association, and the (British) Library Association. The ISBD(M), *International Standard of Bibliographic Description Monographic Publications*, was issued by the International Federation of Library Associations Committee on Cataloguing in 1974. The second edition of the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* (AACR2) was published in 1978 to bring the cataloging rules in line with ISBD. The *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records* (FRBR) was published in 1998; the *Functional Requirements Authority Data* (FRAD) was published in 2009, and the *Functional Requirements of Subject Authority Data* (FRSAD) was published in 2010. This new “functional requirements” family was not necessarily rules, but recommended data models that introduced entity-relationship modeling theory for information-systems design to library metadata. AACR2 remained the primary cataloging code until 2010, when it was replaced by the *Resource Description and Access* (RDA). RDA follows the recommendations and entity-relationship models outlined in FRBR, FRAD, and FRSAD. In 2017, IFLA published the *Library Reference Model*, an approach that unifies and reconciles FRBR, FRAD, and FRSAD into a single model. RDA is expected to be updated to adhere to this new IFLA standard model in 2018.

RDA was adopted as the new primary cataloging standard by the Library of Congress in 2013, and ushered in new ways of describing library resources and the people associated with those resources for all libraries in the United States. One major change in particular was that RDA introduced many new attributes for describing people. Prior to RDA, catalogers created name authority records solely in order to disambiguate and construct a unique primary name for indexing. With RDA, catalogers are now asked to create contextualized biographical sketches in addition to constructing the unique name string for indexing. When they describe people they have the opportunity to include much more personal information:

- Name of the person
- Date associated with the person
- Title of the person
- Fuller form of name
- Other designation associated with the person
- Gender
- Place of birth
- Place of death
- Country associated with the person
- Place of residence, etc.

- Address of person
- Language of person
- Field of activity of the person
- Profession or occupation

This more richly detailed record anticipates future search-and-retrieval systems where the authority files themselves will be searchable. For example, researchers will be able to retrieve all records for authors who write in English, or who come from France. For the first time, catalogers are being asked to describe and classify people.

RDA is different from all earlier standards because it is based on theoretical data models—FRBR, FRAD, and FRSAD. This data model facilitates linking of library records to other data forms that are not held in the library. RDA enables library data to be linked to data elsewhere on the Internet. For example, a patron might search for information about Kate Bornstein on the Internet. With RDA, search results can include links to Wikipedia articles and documentary film clips as well as books by Bornstein held in the library. In other words, RDA facilitates search and retrieval that is both more complex and much vaster than the card catalogs envisioned by Cutter and earlier models of information organization. That theoretical model has material ramifications that are actualized both in the everyday practical task of cataloging library resources and by the creators (or contributors) of those resources through applying the instructions in RDA to library catalog records.

#### Addressing Binary Gender in Cataloging

Such a change in practice has particular implications for the description of the gender of authors. In its initial formation, the options available to catalogers for marking gender was binary: male or female, with a third option, “unknown.” For catalogers informed by queer and trans theory and experience, this binary gender rule was an alarming, if accurate, reflection of dominant ideologies around gender. The rule invited catalogers to assess and assign gender through the use of book jackets or information found on the open web, information that cannot be assumed to be accurate. For example, the hip-hop artist Big Freedia was misgendered as “female” in his Library of Congress name authority record<sup>1</sup> even though she identifies as a male and uses pronouns fluidly (Welch 2011). Encoding gender also assumed that binary gender was both universal and eternal, not subject to change as ways of thinking about gender identity shift in geographical space and chronological time. Finally, the rule left out transgender and nonconforming identities altogether, as if these authors did not and will not exist at all. There was much debate in the library cataloging community on library listservs that exposed a level of ignorance and transphobia in the profession. In 2014, Amber

Billey, Emily Drabinski, and K. R. Roberto addressed in depth the problem and the professional discourse of the binary gender bias in RDA Instruction 9.7 on recording gender in name authority records.

What followed was a collective effort by a handful of catalogers to revise the RDA instructions so that binary gender was not encoded into the metadata of library records. To change the specific RDA instruction 9.7 for recording gender of persons, a proposal was submitted to CC:DA in February 2015 to add the term “transgender” to the list of gender-term options defined by RDA instruction 9.7. This would list the options as “Male, Female, Transgender, and Unknown.” The proposal was accepted by CC:DA, and so it was sent to RSC for their summer 2015 meeting. This proposal was actually deferred, and the broader topic was discussed at the November 2015 meeting. A new proposal was submitted to the RSC at this meeting to continue to allow catalogers to record gender about authors but completely remove the predefined terms for gender as outlined in RDA instruction 9.7. Terms for gender would instead be decided by local cataloging communities. This change means that each individual cataloging community can define its own terminology for describing gender in name authority records. This reverting to local control acknowledges the highly contextual nature of gendered language, enabling cataloging communities to use—or not use—geographically specific terms for gender categories. The deprecation proposal was accepted and the rule was updated in February 2016. The new rule reads as follows:

9.7 Gender

9.7.1 Basic Instructions on Recording Gender

9.7.1.1 Scope

Gender is the gender with which a person identifies.

9.7.1.2 Sources of Information

Take information on gender from any source.

9.7.1.3 Recording Gender

Record the gender of the person, using an appropriate term in a language preferred by the agency creating the data. Select a term from a standard list, if available.

Record gender as a separate element. Gender is not recorded as part of an access point.

This means that a local cataloging community can determine the terms they want to use for recording gender for people, and that gender will never be recorded as part of a unique name string. So, something like *Billey, Amber (female)* will not be recorded as the unique name string in the LCNAF in an RDA-based authority record. Since the rule was changed, a task group within the Program of Cooperative Cataloging

crafted best practices to be used by North American catalogers for recording gender in name authority records for persons. These best practices are currently under review by the cooperative membership. The task group expects these best practices to be formally adopted by the cataloging cooperative in fall 2018.

### Implications

Since the authority record is independent of the bibliographic record, once an author's authority record is changed, then works associated with the author's authority record will link to author's current/correct identity. However, this change in RDA could have implications outside of library data management. The LCNAF data is openly published as linked data on [id.loc.gov](http://id.loc.gov) and is used for data reconciliation and normalization by other open datasets such as Wikidata, ORCID, the Virtual International Authority File, the International Standard Name Identifier database, and most likely many other unknown databases. With all this data reuse, it's impossible to control changes to data across all the platforms. This is why advocacy continues within the library community to encourage recording personal information such as gender only when absolutely necessary to disambiguate or contextualize information about the author.

### Conclusion

Gendered norms are maintained and reproduced in systems and structures usually by people to whom binary gender is normal, natural, and obvious. In library systems, this was certainly the case in the initial rollout of RDA. Binary gender was an obvious way to differentiate authors from one another, and an essential component of describing who people are. For catalogers and classifiers who understand and experience gender in a different way, this rule needed to be contested. While largely invisible to users of library collections and catalogs, the change to the RDA rule adds transgender people to the project of information description and access while producing a useful story of one way that dominant systems can be resisted and changed: deliberately and slowly, by the people who administer them, one rule at a time.

---

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**Emily Drabinski** is associate professor and coordinator of library instruction at Long Island University, Brooklyn. She edits *Gender and Sexuality in Information Studies*, a book series from Library Juice Press/Litwin Books.



Feminist beauty (Aesthetics)  
Globalization  
Minority women  
Stereotypes (Social psychology) in fashion  
Women, Black

We can equip our students with the capacity to ring what they need out of library structures and ringing what you need out of systems that exclude you is a necessary life skill for survival and revolution. And we can also help build a way of shaping

Full screen



EDUCATIONAL

## RACISM IN THE DEWEY DECIMAL SYSTEM

Anna Gooding-Call Sep 3, 2021

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A lot of old things are racist. Mickey Mouse's [white gloves](https://www.npr.org/transcripts/694149912) (<https://www.npr.org/transcripts/694149912>), for example. The concept of a [peanut gallery](https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/commonly-terms-racist-origins/story?id=71840410) (<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/commonly-terms-racist-origins/story?id=71840410>). But public libraries? Impossible, right? Well, public libraries have a lot of race-related issues, from over-policing to an exclusive Master's degree (I wrote about some of this [here](https://bookriot.com/racism-in-american-public-libraries/) (<https://bookriot.com/racism-in-american-public-libraries/>)). But one of the biggest obstacles to manifesting true racial justice in public libraries is the Dewey Decimal System. That's right: the bedrock cataloging system that you learned in elementary school has a major racism issue. If you know anything about its inventor, Melvil Dewey, racism in the Dewey Decimal System may not come as a shock. However, in case you don't, read on, and hold onto your socks.

### DEWEY: A RACIST MAN!

It's actually hard to overstate Dewey's contributions to public education. His work led directly to the creation, not just of public libraries in his home state of New York, but to *the entire concept of the free public library in America*. He also invented the Board of

Regents in New York, which became a template for public education across the country. And, of course, he invented the Dewey Decimal System.

All this said, Dewey was racist as actual fuck (<https://bookriot.com/life-of-melvil-dewey/>)

Even in his day, people were appalled at his antisemitism. He literally opened his own social club just to exclude Jews, including many of his own colleagues. (Needless to say, people of color weren't welcome either.) In the early 1900s, there was an eventually-successful drive to expel him from public life because of his obvious and enormous prejudices. Dewey was kind of a dumpster fire of a guy. Unfortunately, his attitudes inform the cataloging system that he invented.

## WHENCE THE DECIMAL SYSTEM?

Dewey invented the Decimal System in 1873. He was 21 years old and already had a lot of big ideas, one of which involved organizing the library of his employer, Amherst College. To this end, he drew on the work of Sir Francis Bacon, a 16th century natural philosopher. Bacon had been an early pioneer of inductive reasoning, which is crucial to the scientific method, and he'd written at length about logical organization of knowledge for discovery in his book *Instauratio magna*. Dewey also claimed an Italian printmaker named Natale Battezzati as an inspiration. Battezzati had invented a card-based catalog for bookstores. Where Bacon had been dead for a couple centuries and change when Dewey embarked upon his fateful cataloging system, Battezzati was a living and well-known contemporary.

Dewey copyrighted his decimal system in 1876 after sending it to a bunch of colleagues for critique. The first published edition was about 40 pages long. The modern version is hundreds.

It's important to remember the reasons that Dewey wanted public libraries to be a thing in the first place. He was no altruist; he believed that people and concepts belonged in certain places in society and that in those places they must stay. Poor people, for example, needed to be content with non-unionized factory work. Christianity was the only real religion. As for nonwhite people, was there really a need to address them at all?

## THE DEWEY SYSTEM IS RACIST

The quickest possible glance reveals the racism in the Dewey Decimal System. We'll use the religion section as an example. The 200s encompass all religion, nominally, although the problems with this premise are obvious. Each Dewey heading encompasses ten major

subjects, dividing each up by subtopics that add digits to the end of the number. Six of the ten subjects in the 200s are explicitly for Christianity-related subjects. Three of those remaining are either explicitly or implicitly Judeo-Christian. Finally, at the bottom of the heap, the 290s cover “other” religions. Islam, Baha’ai, and Babism all get to share 297. Germanic religions get 293. All “religions of Indic origin,” in other words Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, get to share 294. Hinduism gets all of 294.5 to itself. How generous!

299 covers everything else, and we’re going to focus on this bit because it’s the most glaring example of racism in the Dewey Decimal system I can think of. You see where I’m going with this: religions Dewey associated with people of color ended up with way less space than the “real” faith. Not convinced? Fine. There’s a section in the 200s just for Black people.

The entire 299.6 subdivision is for “religions originating among Black Africans and people of Black African descent.” In fact, everything about “African religion of Haitians in Haiti” can be fit into 299.6097294, according to the DDS. Because at some point, someone — for *some reason* — decided that Haitian religions originating from Black people were not as important as “Germanic” religions originating from white ones. If that doesn’t make you mad, then you’re probably qualified to write a cataloging system in the late 1800s.

## WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

But back up the outrage for a minute. It’s patently ridiculous and racist that the catalog shoves people of color into a corner, but does this racism in the Dewey Decimal System really matter? After all, the books are still there. You can still find them. But *au contraire!* Because the real problem here is the cutter number. That’s the long string of digits after the period in that call number above.

Now think about the last nonfiction library book you borrowed. If you have one handy, grab it. If you happen to be reading in the library, amble on over to those shelves and take a gander at the spines of those books. Do you see any that bear a cutter number longer than four digits?

Of course not! Book spines aren’t that big and catalogers have better things to do than manage seven-digit cutter numbers. What that means is that catalogers boil down long cutters out of necessity. In the case of 299.6097294, our call number for Haitian religions of Black people, it’s likely to end up as 299.609, or even just 299.6. That would lump it in with all faiths with origins associated with Black people, both in and out of Africa, aside from Black Muslims. (They get to go in 297.8, “Islamic Sect and Reform Movements.”)

As gross as it is that the system is classifying (and apparently prioritizing) religion by race, it's actually quite significant that a shortened cutter number for Haitian Religion will make it much harder to find. Once local cataloging conventions reduce it to 299.609 or 299.6, its author's last name will determine where it goes on the shelf. At that point, it won't be with other books about Haitian religion, so people who look for it will need to comb through every book about Black non-Abrahamic religions alphabetically by author. Instead of using the system as a discovery tool, they'll need to know exactly what they're looking for right down to the correct spelling of the author's last name.

## LOST IN THE STACKS

Thus do people of color get lost in the Dewey system. The problem with the 200s occurs again in the 300s, where almost everything about people of color can be classed under 305.8, "Ethnic and National Groups." Within this subheading, Germanic peoples again get a relatively clean cutter — 305.82, to be exact. Meanwhile, 305.895 covers all East and South Asian peoples. You can probably extrapolate the problems with stuffing close to two billion people with literally hundreds of different cultures, languages, and collective priorities into the cataloging equivalent of a studio apartment. Meanwhile, Greeks get the relatively roomy 305.88 all to themselves and the British get 305.82. Because of course they do.

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

It's incredibly hard to re-catalog a collection. If that collection is part of a consortium or system of libraries, it becomes pretty much impossible. There are other, more flexible options for cataloging books out there — [BISAC \(https://bisg.org/page/BISACEdition\)](https://bisg.org/page/BISACEdition), a bookstore-like subject-based organization system, is one, although it has its own problems. However, people have also made some noble attempts to decolonize Dewey. Dorothy Porter, a librarian who worked at Howard University, might be the most well-known of these. She is such an unsung boss that [I need you to go read about her right now. \(https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/remembering-howard-university-librarian-who-decolonized-way-books-were-catalogued-180970890/\)](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/remembering-howard-university-librarian-who-decolonized-way-books-were-catalogued-180970890/)

Beyond heroic efforts by individuals, however, the death of the card catalog has been the main salvation of the Dewey system. Computerized library systems now allow keyword searches. These render the little numbers on the book spine essentially arcane except as unique locators. If you need a book about Malaysian meal etiquette, you can darn well ask the catalog and it'll tell you, even if the book itself is swamped in a sea of foreshortened cutter numbers.

But even as the effective racism of the catalog wanes, the sting remains. The racism in the

Dewey Decimal System makes the prejudices and relative values of its creator abundantly clear, and to a certain extent, it's not really a fix to work around it with technology. After all, not everyone has equal access to computers, or equal tech ability, for that matter. A messed-up shelving system still makes a difference to them just like institutional racism everywhere still makes the world a worse place. Until someone revamps the whole thing, it'll remain a map of Dewey's brain rather than the foundation of a truly public library.

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that's harder to see in other parts of the systems, but in the library it's as easy as reading the catalogue as a text, reading the catalogue as a book that will tell you very true stories about how power works in the world.

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## Access to Library Resources and Services for Minors: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights

The American Library Association supports equal and equitable access to all library resources and services by users of all ages. Library policies and procedures that effectively deny minors equal and equitable access to all library resources and services available to other users is in violation of the American Library Association's *Library Bill of Rights*. The American Library Association opposes all attempts to restrict access to library services, materials, and facilities based on the age of library users.

Article V of the *Library Bill of Rights* states, "A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views." The right to use a library includes free access to, and unrestricted use of, all the services, materials, and facilities the library has to offer. Every restriction on access to, and use of, library resources, based solely on the chronological age, apparent maturity, educational level, literacy skills, emancipatory or other legal status of users violates Article V. This includes minors who do not have a parent or guardian available to sign a library card application or permission slip. Unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness should be able to obtain a library card regardless of library policies related to chronological age.

School and public libraries are charged with the mission of providing services and resources to meet the diverse interests and informational needs of the communities they serve. Services, materials, and facilities that fulfill the needs and interests of library users at different stages in their personal development are a necessary part of providing library services and should be determined on an individual basis. Equitable access to all library resources and services should not be abridged based on chronological age, apparent maturity, educational level, literacy skills, legal status, or through restrictive scheduling and use policies.

Libraries should not limit the selection and development of library resources simply because minors will have access to them. A library's failure to acquire materials on the grounds that minors may be able to access those materials diminishes the credibility of the library in the community and restricts access for all library users.

Children and young adults unquestionably possess First Amendment rights, including the right to receive information through the library in print, sound, images, data, social media, online applications, games, technologies, programming, and other formats.<sup>1</sup> Constitutionally protected speech cannot be suppressed solely to protect children or young adults from ideas or images a legislative body believes to be unsuitable for them.<sup>2</sup> Libraries and their library governing bodies should not resort to age restrictions in an effort to avoid actual or anticipated objections, because only a court of law can determine whether or not content is constitutionally protected.

Article VII of the *Library Bill of Rights* states, "All people, regardless of origin, age, background, or views, possess a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use." This includes students and minors, who have a right to be free from any unreasonable intrusion into or surveillance of their lawful library use.<sup>3</sup>

The mission, goals, and objectives of libraries cannot authorize libraries and their governing bodies to assume, abrogate, or overrule the rights and responsibilities of parents and guardians. As "Libraries: An

American Value” states, “We affirm the responsibility and the right of all parents and guardians to guide their own children’s use of the library and its resources and services.”<sup>4</sup> Libraries and their governing bodies cannot assume the role of parents or the functions of parental authority in the private relationship between parent and child. Libraries and their governing bodies shall ensure that only parents and guardians have the right and the responsibility to determine their children’s—and only their children’s—access to library resources. Parents and guardians who do not want their children to have access to specific library services, materials, or facilities should so advise their own children. Libraries and library governing bodies should not use rating systems to inhibit a minor’s access to materials.<sup>5</sup>

Libraries and their governing bodies have a legal and professional obligation to ensure that all members of the communities they serve have free and equitable access to a diverse range of library resources and services that is inclusive, regardless of content, approach, or format. This principle of library service applies equally to all users, minors as well as adults. Lack of access to information can be harmful to minors. Libraries and their governing bodies must uphold this principle in order to provide adequate and effective service to minors.

<sup>1</sup> *Brown v. Entertainment Merchant's Association, et al.* 564 U.S. 08-1448 (2011).

<sup>2</sup> *Erznoznik v. City of Jacksonville*, 422 U.S. 205 (1975): “Speech that is neither obscene as to youths nor subject to some other legitimate proscription cannot be suppressed solely to protect the young from ideas or images that a legislative body thinks unsuitable for them. In most circumstances, the values protected by the First Amendment are no less applicable when government seeks to control the flow of information to minors.” See also *Tinker v. Des Moines School Dist.*, 393 U.S.503 (1969); *West Virginia Bd. of Ed. v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624 (1943); *AAMA v. Kendrick*, 244 F.3d 572 (7th Cir. 2001).

<sup>3</sup> “Privacy: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights* (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/privacy>),” adopted June 19, 2002, by the ALA Council; amended July 1, 2014; and June 24, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> “Libraries: An American Value (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/americanvalue>),” adopted on February 3, 1999, by ALA Council.

<sup>5</sup> “Rating Systems: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights* (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/rating-systems>),” adopted on June 30, 2015, by ALA Council; amended June 25, 2019.

Adopted June 30, 1972, by the ALA Council; amended July 1, 1981; July 3, 1991; June 30, 2004; July 2, 2008 *under previous name* “Free Access to Libraries for Minors”; July 1, 2014; and June 25, 2019.

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## What is Critical About Critical Librarianship?

Emily Drabinski  
*CUNY Graduate Center*

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Critical librarianship, like librarianship itself, begins with attention to order. Order is at the core of what we do in libraries—ordering books from publishers, ordering books on shelves, ordering patrons around. Libraries are disciplinary spaces and totalizing spaces, a three-dimensional 3D Encyclopedia Britannica, attempting to organize and document the entirety of human knowledge. Contemporary libraries are rooted in the same context as other Enlightenment projects of dominant order: colonial museums and zoos that collect and display objects and animals from across the globe; world maps with cartographic projections that place Europe or the United States at the center of things. Libraries are a part of these efforts, desiring machines that seek to collect everything for everyone for all time, making knowledge universally accessible through cataloging and classification schemes from which nothing escapes.

Critical librarianship acknowledges and then interrogates the structures that produce us as librarians, our spaces as libraries, our patrons as students, faculty, and the public, whose interface with the sum of human knowledge is produced, in large part, by us. (The caveat, of course, being that knowledge-making happens elsewhere; the library may seek to contain all things, but in this it is bound to fail.) These structures are material. Think about the text you are reading right now, the metals and plastics that formed the laptop on which it was typed, the servers and wires that transmitted the text from my desk in New York City to the editors in London. These are material structures, the kind that appear to us only when they break down, in Susan Leigh Star's formulation, when the Internet "goes down," otherwise running invisibly behind or underneath our daily practice. Critical librarianship is also about surfacing these structures and the work that goes into maintaining them.

Critical librarianship is also about another crucial structuring element of our daily lives: time. We can think of time as chronology, or time as a quality of action. This paper originated as

a conference talk, prepared to fit into the one hour allotted, with time for questions. Critical librarianship must grapple with librarianship's relationship to time, to a past accumulation that represents an ordering of only certain kinds of things, reflective of only dominant modes of seeing and making the world. And we must grapple with the future, the kind that we make every day with our pedestrian present-tense practice, the decisions we make about what we collect, how we organize it, the ways that we share and don't, the what and how of our accumulation. The conversation about how we might make a better future for ourselves and each other begins in a framework of critical librarianship: what is it, what do we mean when we talk about it, what critical librarianship looks like when we do it, and how critical perspectives can help us think about and act on the intractable problems in our field.

My own approach to critical librarianship began in a classroom at Syracuse University in 2000: Barbara Kwasnik's Knowledge Organization class. What emerged from our discussions of the various ways that librarians and others in the classification business create and manage the order of things was an acute sense of the political nature of those schemes. Invisible to me until library school, the material conditions of the library surfaced as a kind of text against which critical and political perspectives could be read, understood, contested, challenged, and ultimately changed. Knowledge organization offers a clear and concrete example of how we can see this at work in the library.

Libraries are about fixing things, in ideological structures and in time and space. This is a necessary practice. Can we imagine a library without cataloging and classification structures? Systems to order things? The library would simply be a neatly stacked pile of books, and retrieval would be at random. Libraries implement cataloging and classification schemes in order to facilitate access, creating spaces that are the opposite of random piles. Library shelves are, in

the ideal if not always in practice, ordered, neat, and tidy. Technologies of control from the card catalog to the database to the algorithmic discovery layer collate like materials with like materials, facilitating serendipitous discovery. Our systems also structure material space as books are shelved according to an intellectually and ideologically informed order. In this way, libraries are structuring machines.

Knowledge organization structures are also about power, the power to produce both order and excess. In 2017, I visited the Philippines. Like most librarians I know, I spent much of my time as a tourist in various libraries, in this case in Baguio and Manila. The Philippines is a former U.S. colony, and its contemporary libraries are marked by the extension of American systems of knowledge control. The libraries I visited were hung with signs warning patrons about the scourge of “fake news” and how to spot it. It is arguable that “fake news” is a useful category in U.S. politics in the age of Trump—the current political situation poses problems of power more than problems of fact. “Fake news” is also not at the heart of a contemporary Philippine politics marked by the rise of Duterte and his war on the poor and the left. How does the stuff of U.S. library marketing make its way 10,000 miles around the world to northern Luzon?

One of the ways U.S. global power is reflected in the postcolonial Philippine library is in the use of the Library of Congress classification structure. Materials are ordered according to the fixed categories used in the United States’ Library of Congress and most academic libraries. Of course, such extensions of power are never seamless, always contested, and Philippine libraries capture some of what is excessed in those organizing schemes through the use of Filipiniana collections. These “special” collections contain books written by Filipino authors and by or about the Philippines. It was a surprising thing to find, standing in a library in the northern Philippine

mountains, that books from the land where I stood would be outside the ordering scheme and not the other way around. It would be like setting aside a collection of English books in the British library. And Filipiniana is not a marginal portion of the collection—at the University of the Philippines, Diliman, the largest university collection in the country, Filipiniana outnumbers the rest of the collection by nearly 100,000 titles.

One of the insights of critical librarianship since the 1970s has been this acknowledgement that invisible, intellectual structures actually have a relationship to the material world of knowledge construction. As the tools that order things, our catalogs and classification structures are themselves technologies of power, facilitating some ways of knowing and not others, representing certain ideological ways of seeing the world, and, crucially, not others. As librarians, we deploy these tools of power every day in our practice, as we describe material using controlled vocabularies, assign class numbers to place books on shelves.

Another concrete example from my own experience: One of the questions that has dogged me since my first days working in libraries is the conflict between how I understand gender and sexual identity, and the ways those identities are represented in libraries. I came out and of age in the late 1990s in academic queer circles that were deeply informed by the work of theorists like Judith Butler, even if a person hadn't read her. Indeed, I have not read Butler in her entirety, but I have read enough to understand my own gender as performative, historicized, contingent, and subject to change. Gender, like other social identities, is determined in relationship to structures of power that outline the parameters of what it is possible to be. I don't have a story about myself as once and always a lesbian who slowly came to accept this truth about myself and then revealed it once and for all in a dramatic moment of coming out. Instead, I understand my sexual identity to be relational. I am a lesbian to my mother because that is an

identity she can understand. I am queer in the context of political groups organized around sexual and gender identity. If I was born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, you might call me an invert. If I was born one hundred years from now, who knows? Language and identity will surely have changed by then. Gender and sexuality are fluid and always in motion.

But this is not how gender and sexuality happen in libraries.

Once materials about identity enter the library, they are disciplined into existing structures of knowledge organization. Books about people like me are assigned fixed cataloging terms. I am a lesbian, and that is all I can be. Books about me are cataloged in the HQs, named as a social problem and shelved alongside an array of deviant sexualities. While this analysis is specific to libraries, the same disciplinary process operates elsewhere. Sexual minorities experience that ghettoization and marginalization every day as we move through the world: completing forms at the doctors office, answering questions about boyfriends and girlfriends that simply don't apply, enduring slurs like *dyke* by people on the street. The ideology that informs this experience—the heterosexism and homophobia—is perhaps most clearly read in the text of the classification itself where we can see heteronormativity written into the order of things.

This paradox is for me an example of critical librarianship. Rather than concerning itself with the radical, or root, of various problems, this critical stance looks at what is and tries to understand how it came to be that way, what various systems produce and reproduce in the world, what the stakes might be in accepting something as natural, and how we might imagine systems, structures, objects, and processes differently. We can bring a critical perspective to working with controlled vocabularies and classification schemes that is informed by queer and feminist theory, and by our own embodied experiences. Cataloging and classification cannot be abolished—as librarians we understand that these systems are all that separate us from a giant

and ever expanding pile of books. Instead, classification and cataloging can be analyzed, discussed, and taught critically. We should understand what ideologies they perpetuate and try to understand how to interrupt and change the stories they tell.

This approach to knowledge organization offers one point of access into critical librarianship. Next, I will offer some of what I see as the foundational elements of a critical approach to our work. I'd caution that this is mostly just what I'm talking about when I'm talking about critical librarianship. There isn't a central organizing committee making decisions about what must be changed and how we will organize to make that change. I see this as both a strength and a weakness of critical librarianship—it is a loose enough affiliation that one can likely find comrades somewhere underneath the big tent. But to the extent that social and political change require organized, concerted effort, #critlib is less good at producing that. What I see in that big tent, though, is this: a persistent longing for a librarianship that looks and acts in ways that disrupt the status quo, that center a commitment to social justice and social change, that elevate and amplify the voices of a diverse group of librarians, and that grapple directly with the problems of power concentrated in the hands of a only a few.

For me, the poles holding up that big tent are as follows:

*Critical librarianship interrogates the work of power in structures and systems*

Librarianship is, at its beating heart, is about the production and reproduction of structures and systems. These systems include things like our cataloging and classification systems, technologies like the ILS and the OPAC, as well as frameworks, standards, and guidelines that govern the performance of reference service at the desk and online as well as the what and how of classroom teaching in our libraries. Critical librarianship is concerned with who determines what those systems look like and how they work, and who is excluded from those

processes. Critical librarianship asks who benefits and how from the development of standards of all kinds.

We ask who benefits not only at the scale of the individual, but at the scale of class: groups of people defined by some characteristic that makes them more or less vulnerable to the harms that emerge from structures of order and control. I teach a reference class at the Pratt Institute in New York City, and we always begin with the guidelines promulgated by the American Library Association about what constitutes good reference services. In American libraries, good service requires that we greet people, be friendly, smile, make sure you invite them back to the library again. And then we talk about the assumptions that document makes about people, that everyone is comfortable with direct address, that the emotional labor of a smile is the same amount of work for every person working at a reference desk. Critical librarianship challenges the assumptions of a universal patron or universal librarian, understanding instead that complexities of social experience change how people experience the library as users and as workers.

*Critical librarianship acknowledges the social, economic, and political context of library policies and processes*

Just as sexual and gender identities are contingent, so are answers, solutions, and decisions we make in our libraries. Critical librarians must respond to the particular conditions of our work. I am a librarian at Long Island University, Brooklyn. Our students are largely working class and first generation students of color. We have many immigrant students, not all of them documented. Given this context, we have to think critically about things like security and policing of that space, and this has been the subject of quite a bit of conflict in my library. Some of us want to increase security in order to produce clean and quiet study space. Others of us are

concerned with the implications of policing an already over-policed body of students. There is a tension there that critical librarians acknowledge as we develop and implement library policies.

I also think critical librarians must and do look at the social, political, and economic contexts that govern our work at scales outside the library. I'm thinking here of the requirements many of us face to "articulate our value" to university administrators. Implicit in those requirements are assumptions about what matters: that which can be counted over what can be understood in more complex ways, immediate outcomes over the long term, education as instrumentalist, producing workers for a late capitalist economy. When we are asked to fill out forms documenting the functional results of our work, it's useful to think about what bigger systems those forms might fuel, including the devaluation of the humanities and liberal arts and the shift of higher education toward a credentialing model that simply turns out widgets rather than people.

#### *Critical librarianship surfaces hidden labor*

Library work is often invisible. To users, books seem to appear on shelves and journals in databases the way text appears on the page or screen that you are reading right now—naturally, without any effort, only noticeable if something goes awry, the page does not load or the formatting obscures. We seek seamless user experiences that require as little effort as possible from our students and faculty. In these contexts, critical librarians surface that work. Making work visible allows us to argue for compensating it fairly, and means a stronger claim for institutional resources. When I started my position at Long Island University I had to endure one of those all-day human resources-driven onboarding days. It included what was meant to be an inspiring talk from our Vice President for Academic Affairs about the library as portal, a space where we could get whatever we needed for faculty research. As a librarian, it was chilling to

listen to him talk about libraries as portals rather than collections because I understood immediately that he did not think collections required resources. Looking at the ways our collections budgets have been cut in the years I have been on campus has made it even clearer to me that we need to make labor and its costs apparent to ourselves and then to those who manage our work.

We also need to think about different kinds of labor as worth valuing. What counts as productive in our libraries? Do we only value the number of courses taught or reference desk hours? Or do we need a more nuanced understanding of emotional labor that some of us do more of than others? I am thinking of my Latina colleague here, sought out by Latina students more than the rest of us because she connects with them differently. Students want to work with Gloria, they build deep relationships with her that help sustain them to graduation. It's important emotional labor, but difficult to measure in a tenure portfolio. How can we surface and value that work beyond the statistics? What does it mean for some of us to emerge as lifelines for students, and how are we supported when that happens?

*Critical librarianship articulates the infrastructures that enable some lines of inquiry and not others*

Libraries facilitate the production of knowledge. We do this by collecting materials, organizing and describing those materials so that they are accessible, connecting users to those resources through teaching at the reference desk, in classrooms, on the phone, and online, and, increasingly, using our resources to produce knowledge itself through library publishing ventures. We can think of the systems that facilitate all these efforts as infrastructure. The network of pipes in a house determines how water flows, and the placement of faucets determines where and how we can put it in a glass. In the same way, our acquisitions processes

determine the kinds of materials we can include in our collections, and, in turn, what constitutes the “stuff” our users can mobilize when producing knowledge of their own. If we only collect materials from major publishers, available through the infrastructures of collections assembled by our book jobbers, we miss the knowledge produced in zines, small magazines, artists books, and elsewhere. Similarly, when we de-fund and de-staff our cataloging departments and rely on copy cataloging, we don’t develop local cataloging thesauri that might better represent the language that students use when searching our OPACs. Because so many of these infrastructures are seen as natural and necessary, critical librarians play a role in pointing to them and interrogating the kinds of work they make possible and what they don’t.

I think it’s also critical here to think about who we have in the library and the ways that they help students frame some kinds of questions and not others. This requires both hiring a diverse library faculty, but also being clear about the perspectives we bring to the classroom and the reference desk so that we’re aware of the directions in which we steer students. I am thinking here of a research consultation I had with one of our public health students. She had been assigned to argue the “con” side in a debate about the link between poverty and health outcomes. The pro side was arguing that poverty produced a range of health issues: anxiety and depression, lack of access to fresh and healthy food, that anger that just eats and eats at you when you live every day in a world that is basically unfair and stacked against you from the first. What is the con side? My brain struggled to come up with anything. It just wasn’t a question I could answer because I couldn’t imagine a way that poverty wasn’t bad for people. We all have these kinds of blocks on what our brains are capable of thinking, and as librarians, that affects the kinds of questions we’re able to get students to ask, and the answers we can give them. Making those blocks visible so that we can begin to move around them is critical.

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*Critical librarianship knows that the world could be different*

At the heart of critical librarianship, for me, is a conviction and a radical hope that things could be different from the way they are now. Critical librarians acknowledge the contingency and constructedness of the world we find ourselves living and working in. Simply because things have “always been this way” does not mean they are meant to be or that they will be forever. For the critical librarian, nothing about the ways things are is a given, and all is subject to change. We librarians are the agents of that change. We work every day to make and remake the structures that produce the terrain of the present and, therefore, the future. We could make things differently.

We are also agents of reproducing the same. Every time we teach students in our information literacy classes that scholarly articles are “good” articles, we reproduce ideas about who has a right to speak in the academy. In that moment, we can make it otherwise, and instead teach students the skills necessary to interrogate information of all kinds, including the five scholarly articles their composition instructor has told them to use in their end of semester research paper. As librarians, we have significant power, more than I think we know that we do, and we can choose to wield it every day. Part of the task of critical librarianship is to delineate the boundaries and limits of that power, to describe what it is and how it is produced, and identify the moments where we can enact it, when we build our collections, connect with our users, and make the case for our work outside of our libraries.

For me, this set of principles defines a critical librarianship as something different from a radical or progressive librarianship. You’ll notice that missing from my list is a set of outcomes that we ought to be working towards. This is not because I don’t have an idea of the kinds of changes I want to see in our libraries, but because I think a critical perspective is a matter of

heuristics, or developing frames through which we view the work we do. Developing a habit of mind that consistently interrogates what otherwise feels natural means that we can respond nimbly to problems as they emerge in our libraries and in our world.

This habit of mind is palpably important when those of us who teach meet a group of students in a classroom. When we approach teaching with a frame that centers student learning and student voice and that looks for openings where we can do that centering, great things can happen. I am thinking of a particularly surly group of students I once taught—an English composition class that came to the library to learn how to access scholarly journal articles for a research paper. If you have been teaching long you have taught a group like this: frustrated they had to be in the classroom, resentful of the librarian at the front of the room, extremely sure that there was nothing I could possibly teach them to do, think, or experience. I brought to that moment a belief that students know things, that people are curious and that my enthusiasm for the work I do will be shared by them. I also understand that the dynamic of a classroom extends to the library session: so much of what students bring to us is a projection of the relationship they already have with their teacher. If the professor is connected to students, the students will be connected to the librarian. And the opposite is true. If a professor has failed to animate a class, the students won't be animated in the library.

In this case, the students were notably frustrated that they had to be in a class with me. The professor had asked me to teach citation practice, something I actually love teaching because citation is one of these infrastructures of power that, once introduced to students, also introduces them to the ways that we signal authority and engagement with one another in our writing. Instead of simply barreling through with my active learning exercise informed by critical theory, I asked the students why they were so angry. It was a powerful moment, one that has shaped how

I approach angry students ever since: one of the students told me how they were feeling. They were angry at their professor. She was strict. She demanded that students bring a three hole punch to every class and would take points off their grades if they didn't show up with that hole punch. She was frustrated with students because they failed to produce papers with correct citations--that's why she'd asked me to teach it. She was angry with them. The students, in turn, were angry and hurt and betrayed by their teacher. "She wants us to use APA citation, but she won't show us how." Bringing a critical mind to the classroom means seeing moments like that as openings, openings for connecting with students as an ally against power.

I think our daily work lives are full of moments like this. Do we adopt food and drink policies that increase policing in our libraries? Do we implement noise policies that work for us or that work for our students? Do we replace missing staplers or refuse on the grounds that student steal? Do we add zines and other alternative publications to our collections? Do we say yes or no, when and to whom? Adopting a critical habit of mind can facilitate a liberatory practice in all the quotidian aspects of our work, which, if we are honest, is most of library work.

I will close this piece with a few issues in our field that I think critical librarians must address. Many of these are about us as the people who make libraries work. I believe we matter. Our work matters. Who we have at our reference desks and in our classrooms matters. Since the election of Donald Trump, an American instance of a global right wing turn, we have seen an explosion of texts defining the role that libraries can play during difficult times. We can offer information and entertainment, space for groups of people to meet and connect and organize. We can create research guides that help people understand how to resist authoritarian regimes. All of those things that libraries do are well described elsewhere. What we sometimes miss is the importance of beginning our critical work with ourselves.

*Who works in our libraries?*

Think about the people employed as librarians in your library. Then think about who is not represented. Libraries in the United States are notoriously white, 88% at last count in a country where white people will be the minority within the next few decades. We are homogeneously staffed. Most academic librarians look like me: white, middle class, cisgender, able bodied, English speaking, and bringing a critical lens that is both informed by those things and not informed by the things I am not. The problem of a lack of diversity in libraries--which I would like to name here as a problem of persistent whiteness--has been well-documented. My library serves a majority-black student population, and we have only one black librarian on staff.

Critical librarianship must grapple concretely and directly with the dynamics of white supremacy and consolidations of wealth and opportunity to a vanishing few that produce these facts on the ground. We need to be serious with ourselves about why librarians consistently fail to hire people who do not look and act like them. And we need to ask why librarians of color so often leave the profession. This requires librarians to develop a more sophisticated analysis of race. The problem of diversifying the profession can't simply be about getting more people of color into and then through library school. Many people of color graduate from library school. Instead, we need to understand barriers to unbiased hiring. I have been on many hiring committees and have often had to fight against committees that refused to talk about race in the hiring process. I have been reported to a library director for bringing bias into the hiring process by opening up a discussion of race. I have listened to white librarians reject Black librarians as candidates because they are aggressive or angry or some other racist stereotype about Black women. We need to normalize the discussion of race in libraries so that we can talk frankly about what it will take to persuade white librarians to hire people of color to work in their libraries.

*What are the working conditions of librarians?*

Once we finish talking about who we are hiring in our libraries, we need to talk about what happens to them once they are working with us. When we talk about librarians of color, we need to respond to concerns raised again and again about working majority-white spaces. Are our libraries spaces where microaggressions are uncontested? Are black librarians treated as full and valued members of the staff and faculty, or do white librarians treat librarians of color as exceptions?

We also need to ask critical questions about whether the libraries that we all work in are hospitable to all of us. That means our structures and processes must make room for differences of all kinds. Last year I visited the Xwi7xwa Library at the University of British Columbia. The library uses a knowledge organization structure mapped onto indigenous ways of knowing. The Brian Deer classification scheme orders materials according to indigenous ontologies rather than the western ontologies I am used to. If we think about the HQ classification, we can see the way it places materials in the order of a particular conception of the human life cycle--sex gives way to marriage and then to child rearing, young adulthood, courtship, and on to marriage again. In the Xwi7xwa Library, this was not the ideological story. The emphasis was not on time or progressivism but on on space and place and social networks. The geography was indigenous, not western. It was unusual for me, both in that I had never been in a library with the Brian Deer system, and because most libraries I have worked in or used as a patron are built for people like me, from a western perspective, English-language-speaking, white and with a certain liberal understanding of the world. If I took a job in the Xwi7xwa Library, I would need to re-order my understanding of knowledge so that it aligned with what I saw on the shelves. This is what librarians and library workers are asked to do when they enter all libraries, and it's worth

thinking about what that might mean for librarians from non-dominant cultural locations. How can we make the library a space that adapts to difference, rather than asking only some of us to adapt to the library instead?

*Are we facilitating resistance and change?*

Most of us design our collections and resources to match the needs of our curriculum. My library supports a majority health-sciences campus. We use government health and medicine databases, we use Elsevier products. It is important to use our libraries to help students gain access to the language and discourse of power. There is value in teaching students how to use Boolean logic and truncation, how to pick up and work with the dominant language embedded in our classification structures, and how to use scholarly information sources. Students must have access to the language of power so that they can either use it or reject it. We must equip students with these skills.

We also have a responsibility to build library collections and service models that help students understand themselves as capable of intervening in and changing the library, the university, and the world. We do this in part by making sure our libraries contain alternative and outsider voices and that we work to include those voices in the literature we search and the classes we teach. Library workers can use our role as people who help other people navigate systems and structures of power--from our OPACS to our noise rules--to also help students see the ways that systems and structures of power are everywhere, organizing all of our interactions in the social world. Once we see those systems we can begin to articulate and point to potential sites of resistance. For librarians, this can mean strengthening the local cataloging of our collections. It might mean fighting to make name changes easier for transgender students in our patron information databases. Once we leave the library, it might mean building relationships

with other political actors. As librarians, we build and then work inside of systems of power every day. We are perhaps best positioned to see them at work elsewhere, and to intervene and change them.

*Find our power and organize it.*

Finally, I will return to the ideas of structure and time that opened this paper. In terms of time, I would argue that we are in an exigent moment, one that requires a differently urgent response to the challenges we see both inside our libraries and in the world in which we are embedded. Many of us see our safety nets dismantled day by day by governments that see obligations to the wealthy as more important than their obligations to the poor. Spectacular building fires that leave poor and working class people. Walls are built at borders. Library workers are removed from libraries. Immigrants and refugees face discrimination and outright violence. Wealth is systematically transferred from workers to the global one percent. These phenomena are linked. If structures are about producing and directing power, librarians must get to work building ours.

I have some recent practice at doing this as part of an organized labor struggle. In 2016, at the end of contract negotiations, I was locked out by my employer along with the rest of the faculty at Long Island University, Brooklyn. Because we could not agree to contract terms with a management that refused to bargain, they fired us all. Management took our syllabi and uploaded them into course shells and assigned administrators and people hired with little vetting to teach our classes for low wages. They cut our salaries and health insurance with no warning and blocked our access to email, one of the only tools we had to communicate with each other. They hired security guards to prevent us from coming to campus. It was a terrifying encounter with a brute power. As we say in the labor movement, management is the best organizer. The faculty at

LIU Brooklyn organized for a win, if a small one. We refused the initial contract offer and forced management to end the lockout.

One of the central lessons I took from that experience was that a clear-eyed analysis of brute power is necessary for a critical librarianship that seeks to make a meaningful difference. It is simply not enough, not ever and certainly not in this urgent moment, to develop a critique, and then head to the pub for a pint. We must first locate the structures of power available to us—our labor unions, our cataloging and classification schemes, our electoral system—and begin to use those structures as ladders, bridges, staircases for building better worlds.

Librarians are some of the only people who understand what organizing for power and for change--concretely, materially, and in the present tense--can mean. Organizing is what we are best at. We put books in a row and classes on calendars. We schedule reference desk shifts and design complicated workflows. It turns out that this is also what politics is: coordinating opposition to power is a lot like coordinating the instruction schedule. Organizing is about talking to people and helping them articulate what they need and find ways to get it. Organizing is the reference interview, over and over and over again.

The time is urgent for critically informed action by all of us, by librarians. That action requires building power. The task I see as most clearly at hand for critical librarians is to locate our power in our structural positions and in each other, and to organize that power, collectively, toward shared ends. That is concrete work, in material time. It requires talking to each other about what matters, developing a shared critical analysis that can inform our work. We have to find the one small task that, coupled with so many other small tasks, will build our power while making our worlds change. In other words, we need to be librarians.

- 
- Gender identity--Law and legislation.
  - Gender identity--Law and legislation--United States.
  - Homophobia--Law and legislation.
  - Homophobia--Law and legislation--United States.
  - Homosexuality--Law and legislation.
  - Homosexuality--Law and legislation--United States.
  - Human reproductive technology--Law and legislation--United States.
  - Intersex people--Legal status, laws, etc.--United States.

These are the standardized controlled terms that the Library of Congress gives us as Subject Headings to assign to materials about sexual gender and sexual identity in our library collections.

Narrower Term: Domestic relations

8:32 / 21:32 - Subject Headings >

Full screen (f)

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2019

### Critical Information Literacy

Emily Drabinski  
*CUNY Graduate Center*

Eamon Tewell  
*Columbia University*

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# Critical Information Literacy

EMILY DRABINSKI and EAMON TEWELL

Long Island University, Brooklyn, USA

Critical information literacy (CIL) is a theory and practice that considers the sociopolitical dimensions of information and production of knowledge, and critiques the ways in which systems of power shape the creation, distribution, and reception of information. CIL acknowledges that libraries are not and cannot be neutral actors, and embraces the potential of libraries as catalysts for social change. Information literacy has been a large part of the academic library discourse internationally since the 1970s, as reflected in various professional standards and models. In 1989, the American Library Association convened a Presidential Committee on Information Literacy in order to develop a profession-wide approach to information literacy as an education domain for academic librarians. The committee's final report facilitated the growth of professional infrastructures that made information literacy central to academic librarian identity through the development of professional round tables, journals, task forces, and conferences. In 2000, this work culminated in a document from the Association of College & Research Libraries: the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*. From the perspective of CIL, the *Competency Standards* offered a decontextualized, skills-based approach to finding and evaluating information, and arguments against Standards-based teaching in libraries have formed a significant strand of CIL critique. The term information literacy itself has been observed to be comprised of two inherently contradictory terms connoting both freedom and control, and in this way may encourage a productive tension if engaged with critically by librarians (Pawley, 2003).

In many ways, critical information literacy can be seen as an approach to information literacy informed by critical theory, and oftentimes critical pedagogy. CIL ultimately seeks to identify and take action upon forms of oppression, and proposes to undertake this work by engaging with local communities. In addition, praxis is a concept central to critical information literacy in that it encourages the reciprocity between theory, reflection, and practice (Jacobs, 2008). Though not limited to teaching, critical information literacy is rooted in information literacy instruction and the educational efforts of librarians. CIL urges students to recognize and resist dominant modes of information production, dissemination, and use. Foundations of the critical information literacy literature include Elmborg's 2006 article on critical information literacy instruction and the edited volume *Critical Library Instruction: Theories and Methods* (Accardi, Drabinski, & Kumbier, 2010).

While these works and others find inspiration in Paulo Freire and the field of critical pedagogy, other researchers have emphasized the usefulness of critical theory as well as

*The International Encyclopedia of Media Literacy*, Renee Hobbs and Paul Mihailidis (Editors-in-Chief).

Gianna Cappello, Maria Ranieri, and Benjamin Thevenin (Associate Editors).

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composition studies. Librarians incorporate queer, hip-hop, feminist, and critical race pedagogies into their instructional practice and document this work in conferences, books, and professional journals. CIL also engages the field of composition studies as librarians articulate information literacy through rhetorical frameworks. The field of CIL has grown significantly since 2000. Two notable works that expand upon and complement prior research include Higgins and Gregory's *Information Literacy and Social Justice: Radical Professional Praxis* (2013) and Downey's *Critical Information Literacy: Foundations, Inspirations, and Ideas* (2016). Tewell's (2015) literature review contains an introduction to the scholarship of CIL.

Critical information literacy overlaps considerably with critical media literacy, particularly concerning the teaching of knowledge structures and considerations of power and agency in both education and media creation and consumption. CIL tends to be more specific in its challenges to dominant information systems in that it frequently locates its critiques within and in relation to libraries and librarianship. Some proponents of CIL argue for expanding the literacies addressed in the library classroom to include visual literacies, media literacies, and metaliteracies, suggesting that the narrow focus on information constrains the critical potential of librarians. Still, information remains the focus for CIL practitioners. CIL and critical media literacy share many concerns, and additional research on the intersections between these fields could be of significant use to educators.

The theory and practice of critical information literacy continues to flourish, with the pace of scholarly interest showing no sign of slowing. Much of the early work in CIL centered on critiques of the Competency Standards adopted by the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) in 2000. In 2016, the profession replaced the Competency Standards with the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, a document that incorporates some ideas of the CIL literature. The *Framework* emphasizes concepts rather than competencies, and argues for contextual and self-reflective information literacy education that centers the needs of particular learners in particular situations. Since its adoption, the *Framework* has been the site of significant professional engagement, some of which expands the theory and practice of CIL.

As a document intended to shape both teaching practices in academic libraries and cross-disciplinary conversations about information and learning, the *Framework* is constituted primarily of six frames (ACRL, 2016). "Authority Is Constructed and Contextual," for instance, asks teachers and learners to consider context in assessing authority, as opposed to accepting more reductive indicators of authority such as an author's credentials or an article having undergone peer review (Drabinski, 2016). "Information Has Value" is a good example of the ways in which the *Framework* is both more open toward critical teaching and does not go far enough in its critique of information's production: the Knowledge Practices and Dispositions described include the examination of one's information privilege and recognizing the commodification of personal information, yet admit no contradiction when referring to the "information marketplace." Some have critiqued the *Framework* for not directly connecting social justice with information literacy, and have pointed to a need to move beyond the *Framework* for critical librarians (Battista et al., 2015). Ultimately, it is up to librarians

to develop educational opportunities appropriate to their local contexts: a reality the *Framework* document acknowledges and encourages.

Current interest in CIL ranges from the theoretical to the practical, with the two-volume *Critical Library Pedagogy Handbook* (Pagowsky & McElroy, 2016), an article by Tewell (2017), and the recently established *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* being good examples of current directions and interests. Recent literature has engaged a number of theoretical orientations that range from classical Greek theories of time (Drabinski, 2014) to cyberfeminism (Schlesselman-Tarango, 2014). CIL is increasingly expansive in its consideration of useful theories and shared interests with other fields, particularly as it has matured.

With the intensifying corporatization of higher education across the world, CIL must continue to resist the encroachment of neoliberalism into new territories both digital and physical, as well as act to counter political regimes that attempt to stifle freedom of speech and sow confusion among citizens. CIL is fundamentally concerned with how some forms of knowledge and not others are produced as true. Making knowledge is a political project, one that critical library educators seek to surface and make evident to all kinds of learners. It is crucial that librarians and other educators not attempt to avoid politics, but instead engage directly with the major issues of violence towards women, people of color, queer people, and other marginalized populations, and with the systems of power that sanction and endorse these acts of violence. Connecting that violence to forms of knowledge production, dissemination, and use will continue to be a focus for CIL practitioners and theorists. Critical information literacy is one way that librarians can work with others to identify and resist forms of oppression, and it is imperative that this work continues.

SEE ALSO: Critical Pedagogy; Knowledge Structures

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Meeting Date OCT/24/2023



## Board of Trustees Public Comment Request Form

Anyone wishing to address the Board must arrive early and sign up with library staff at least 10 minutes before the scheduled start of the meeting. Please note that forms must be submitted in person at the Board of Trustees meeting. Comments will be heard in the order in which requests are received.

\*Name MIKE MILLER

\*Agenda Item or Topic Action for Kids

Group Represented (If applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

County of Residence Christian

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a Christian County Library Card yes

*\*Required Information*

4

To Christian County Library Trustees

October 24, 2023

Our library has a Mission Statement, which reads: "Building community for all through access, innovation, and engagement."

In an effort to work toward that mission scores of people have come to these Trustee meetings since March with an important issue on their minds: protecting children from **Obscene, erotic or pornographic content that is age-inappropriate** at our public library.

To me, it seems that these parents are asking for one thing...moving or labeling books with **Obscene, erotic or pornographic content that is age-inappropriate** so that unsuspecting children and parents aren't blindsided by them.

HERE'S A KEY POINT: You can meet your mission of having information available for all, including content that is **Obscene, erotic or pornographic, and not age-appropriate WITHOUT** having to shove it down people's throats, or place it willy-nilly throughout the building.

To date, little to no action has taken place regarding this issue. It's hard to imagine why.

The reason given for this inaction parrots the American Library Association's mission, which in part is "ensuring access to information for all."#.

This reply, or excuse, is a false flag, or red herring response. Libraries do NOT have every book published on their shelves. And they never will. But they can and do provide access to thousands of books not on their shelves through an interactive library loan process.

I urge our library team and its Trustees to be independent minded. To act on behalf of the needs and desires of our community and its children. Even if it involves compromise.

If the question arises as to which books need moving, or a labeling, there is an easy solution. Start with some of the titles people coming to this meeting have shared and do two things:

1. Pull and share some of the books with your mother, or your grandmother, and ask if they are appropriate for children to freely view?

- AND 2. Let Missouri Highway Patrol officers who will soon operate an office on library property view the books. Then ask if they are appropriate for children to freely view? And if they would like them in their waiting room?

Their responses will help guide your decision making.

It's going to take courage. It's going to take independent thinkers. It's going to take people to live up to their oath of office.

Take action, please. And put a motion on the table at the next Trustee meeting so we know your intentions.

#The mission of ALA is "to provide leadership for the development, promotion and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all!"

Mike Miller, Nixa, Mo.

Meeting Date 10/24/23



## Board of Trustees Public Comment Request Form

Anyone wishing to address the Board must arrive early and sign up with library staff at least 10 minutes before the scheduled start of the meeting. Please note that forms must be submitted in person at the Board of Trustees meeting. Comments will be heard in the order in which requests are received.

\*Name Aileena Keen

\*Agenda Item or Topic  
inappropriate content in minor's section

Group Represented (If applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

County of Residence Christian

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

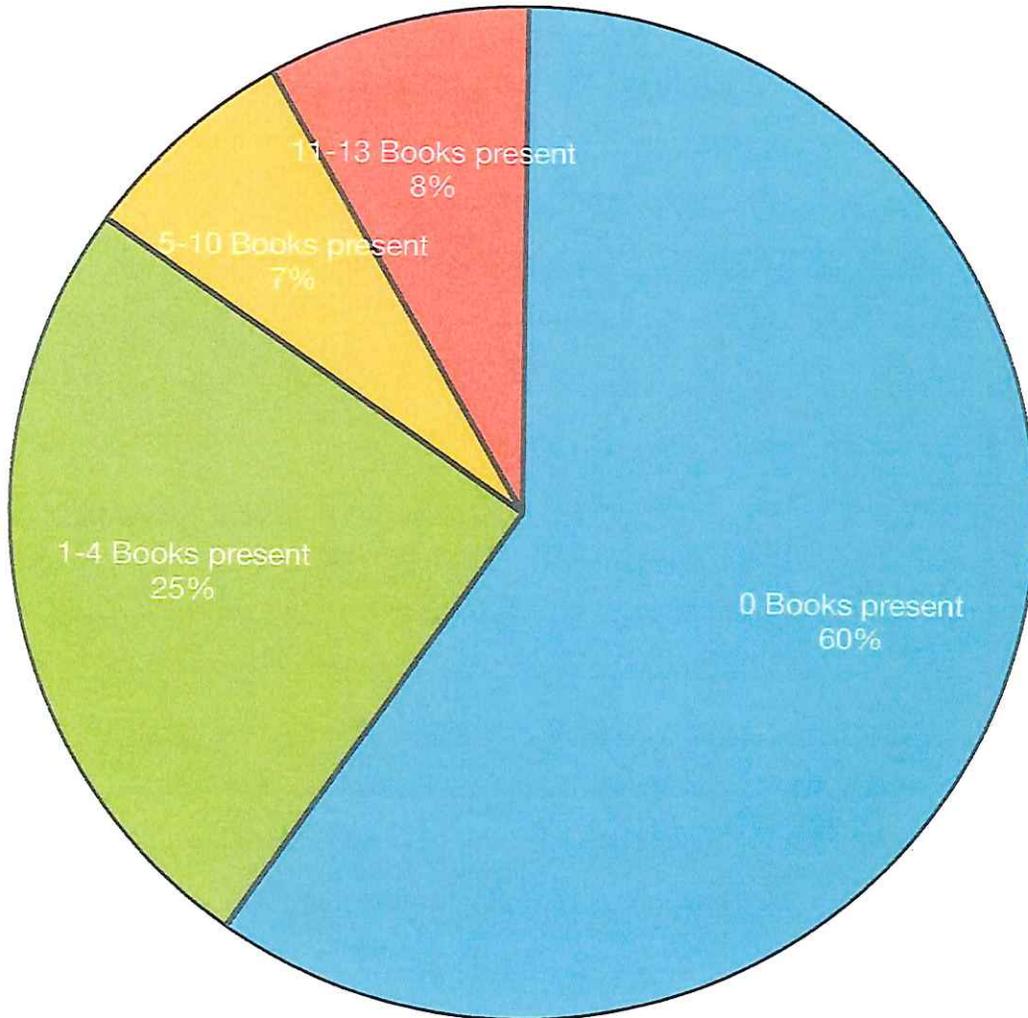
Email \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a Christian County Library Card Yes

*\*Required Information*

Sample of Missouri libraries with **sexually explicit and age-inappropriate content** available to minors in the children's and young adults sections.

● 0 Books present    ● 1-4 Books present    ● 5-10 Books present    ● 11-13 Books present



\*Sample of 72 public libraries out of the 114 Missouri counties.

\*\*Sample of 13 Sexually explicit and/or Age-Inappropriate Books in Missouri Libraries

Books included: Jack of Hearts by LC Rosen, Flamer by Mike Curato, All Boys Aren't Blue by George M. Johnson, Breathless by Jennifer Niven, Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic by Alison Bechdel, Gender Queer: a Memoir by Maia Kobabe, Empire of Storms by Sarah J. Maas, Sex Plus: Learning, Loving, and Enjoying your Body by Laci Green, This Book is Gay by June Dawson, Too Bright to See by Kyle Lukoff, Jacob's New Dress by Sarah Hoffman, It Feels Good to be Yourself: A Book about Gender Identity by Theresa Thorn, and The Breakaways by Cathy G Johnson

\*Data was taken using publicly available data through online catalogs including Missouri Evergreen, Mobius, www.kclibrary.org, and Cool Cat online catalog (September & October 2023).

Registered Voters 66,193 - Total Ballots 10,355 : 15.64%

29 of 29 Precincts Reporting 100.00%

MARIONVILLE R-9 SCHOOL BOARD		
Number of Precincts	2	
Precincts Reporting	2	100.00%
Vote For 3		
Total Votes	0	
RYAN BRAD WILSON	0	0%
JODI RAWLINGS	0	0%
CODY FLETCHER	0	0%
GARY WRIGHT	0	0%

OZARK R-VI SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER		
Number of Precincts	12	
Precincts Reporting	12	100.00%
Vote For 3		
Total Votes	8,161	
AMBER BRYANT	2,173	26.63%
RALPH PHILLIPS	1,297	15.89%
GUY CALLAWAY	1,308	16.03%
JOEY MILLS	880	10.78%
ANTHONY PETROSINO	967	11.85%
CHRISTINA TONSING	1,536	18.82%

NIXA PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD		
Number of Precincts	17	
Precincts Reporting	17	100.00%
Vote For 3		
Total Votes	12,702	
HEATHER ZOROMSKI	3,055	24.05%
LINDA L. DAUGHERTY	3,343	26.32%
ALEX BRYANT	3,224	25.38%
ELIZABETH DUDASH-BUSKIRK	1,172	9.23%
JASEN D. GOODALL	1,908	15.02%

SPARTA R-III SCHOOL BOARD		
Number of Precincts	7	
Precincts Reporting	7	100.00%
Vote For 3		
Total Votes	1,203	
DANNY J. RAINS	366	30.42%
DENNIS LILLY	215	17.87%
JEREMY BUTTS	327	27.18%
RICK JONES	295	24.52%

NIXA PUBLIC SCHOOL QUESTION		
Number of Precincts	17	
Precincts Reporting	17	100.00%
Total Votes	4,933	
YES	3,494	70.83%
NO	1,439	29.17%

BILLINGS FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT		
Number of Precincts	2	
Precincts Reporting	2	100.00%
Total Votes	408	
YES	320	78.43%
NO	88	21.57%

BILLINGS BOARD MEMBER WARD I		
Number of Precincts	2	
Precincts Reporting	2	100.00%
Vote For 1		
Total Votes	0	

Meeting Date 10/24/23\*



## Board of Trustees Public Comment Request Form

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\*Name Wanetta Bright

\*Agenda Item or Topic  
sexual content

Group Represented (If applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

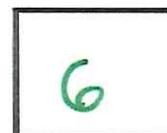
County of Residence Christian

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a Christian County Library Card Yes

*\*Required Information*



John 8:31-32; "If you hold to my teachings, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set You free."

Exposure to Pornography, a Form of Sexual Trauma"; This is the name and subject of an article written for the Journal of Psychiatry Reform, December 7th, 2021, by Caroline Giroux. Ms. Giroux is an Associate Clinical Professor and a Psychiatrist at the University of California, Davis Medical Center. After citing multiple examples in the beginning of this article of particular cases of young men (teens to early 20's) whom she had treated displaying lude, self-destructive, or even criminal behavior among the general public, Ms. Giroux boiled the cause down to one common denominator in each case...each of these young men had been exposed to pornographic material at a young age. She went on to say, "Exposing children to pornography should be forbidden and better regulated, as it is violating their spiritual boundaries and evolving beliefs around body, sexual development, and intimate relationships, in a similar way that direct sexual abuse on their body does. If this trauma is not identified and processed promptly, the survivor runs the risk of re-enacting as an attempt to resolve what once left him or her powerless, or of even engaging in similar criminal behaviors. In plain language, that means that the victims who either see the porn at a young age or are abused themselves are at risk of becoming abusers themselves. At one point in the article, Ms. Giroux questioned one of the young men, a 16 year old who had tried to commit suicide, and was totally obsessed and overwhelmed with masturbation, to the point that it had taken over his life. When asked about exposure to porn, he admitted that he had seen porn on a phone at 6 years old. When asked how he felt seeing the pictures, he was given the options of pleasure, disgust, etc. He answered "pleasure." His young mind simply couldn't process his feelings about the erotic images placed before him. This premature exposure to sexual information had wreaked havoc, and created a porn and masturbation addiction that was driving him to want to end his life at 16. In a synopsis, Ms. Giroux states, "In summary, exposure to pornography is not trivial. It can have traumatic effects leading to significant distress, disruptive behaviors, compulsive sexuality, and even suicidal attempts. Until our society becomes more aware to the point of preventing this by regulating access of such materials more effectively, psychotherapy should be the main intervention to address the unresolved trauma.

1. My friends and I are not book burners, book banners, or minority right wingers; we simply ask that these graphic books

be rated and placed in appropriate areas to protect unsuspecting families from unwittingly accessing them. We are patriots, Christians, moms, dads, and grandmas and grandpas, and some of us are even abuse survivors, doing all that we can to protect our kids and grandkids.

2. And finally, the biggest truth of all. The reason that some of us are here every month, speaking the truth, is that we are patriots and Christians, driven by love for our God, and love for America and the next generation. But I want to tell you about others among us. Myself, and some of the most passionate friends that I know who speak are those survivors who Ms. Giroux spoke of...when I was 9 years old, the family member who was supposed to be caring for me decided to go to the local bar after I went to sleep, and went off and left me alone with the house unlocked. I woke up in the middle of the night in the process of being molested by an adult male. That man stole my childhood; I was never a little girl after that night. That man was a pervert; and anyone who denies the absolute evil in an adult man or woman doing what he did to me is a pervert, also. Many of these books in the children's and youth section are pervert instruction manuals. Myself, and other survivors like me, want to make sure that those instruction manuals stay out of the hands of young ones, so that the cycle of trauma that we know all too well is broken.

Meeting Date 10/24/23



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\*Name Jamie Ray Gross

\*Agenda Item or Topic  
New Policy

Group Represented (If applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

County of Residence Christian

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a Christian County Library Card Yes

*\*Required Information*