GLBT Controlled Vocabularies and Classification Schemes

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Introduction
The provision of unambiguous and non-pejorative physical and intellectual access to library materials on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people has been a goal of the GLBT Round Table since its inception. One of the first sponsored sessions of the Round Table (then the Task Force on Gay Liberation) was a panel discussion featuring Joan Marshall and Steven Wolf at the 1971 ALA Annual Meeting in Dallas. Marshall and Wolf tartly criticized the sexist and homophobic labeling which then prevailed in the Library of Congress Subject Headings and the Dewey Decimal Classification. Their remarks were later published in the seminal volume Revolting Librarians.

Members of the Task Force were not alone in voicing their criticisms. Sandy Berman’s Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People also appeared in 1971. Among Berman’s many recommendations was the deletion of the cross-reference to “Sexual perversion” for both “Homosexuality” and “Lesbianism,” enacted by the Library of Congress in 1972. At the Hennepin County Library, Berman and his associates developed innovative local subject headings pertaining to sexuality, as well as other topics. Many of these were subsequently adopted by other libraries as well as incorporated into LCSH via the Subject Authority Cooperative Program (SACO).

Smaller, more specialized collections of GLBT materials (most of which had been compiled by queer people for a queer audience) could not depend on the blunt instrument that was LCSH to describe their holdings. Individual libraries and archives around the world began to develop their own controlled vocabularies as well as prepare indices for GLBT periodicals in their collections.

In 1986, the Task Force charged a committee with the mission of merging many of these vocabularies into a “superthesaurus” intended to alleviate the burden of future GLBT subject catalogers and indexers. The result, completed in 1988, was the International Thesaurus of Gay and Lesbian Index Terms. This
was eventually utilized as the thesaurus for the microfiche *Gay and Lesbian Periodicals Index* (apparently commissioned by the Special Libraries Association) but did not otherwise enjoy widespread adoption.

In most instances, controlled vocabularies and classification schemes designed to provide subject access to GLBT materials have been victims of the successful campaign to introduce appropriate terminology into LCSH as well as the increased use of networked bibliographic utilities in smaller libraries. Their usage does remain current in a handful of specialized research collections, however, and a proprietary thesaurus supports searching in the periodical database *LGBT Life*.

The vocabularies, classification schemes, and other resources in this list are mainly from a Western and white perspective. To apply this perspective to colonized and otherwise oppressed cultures is an act of colonial violence. More work needs to be done to research subject access and culturally responsive metadata for these groups (such as indigenous groups); however, we must respect the rights of these cultures and groups to not want their information and lives accessible to outsiders.

The bibliography which follows relies on Dee Michel’s inventory (prepared for the Round Table in 1990) as well as my own research and the research of Matt Johnson. For unpublished titles, I give the information which Matt provides about where a copy may be obtained. For secondary literature, abstracts are provided where available. No bibliography is comprehensive, and I welcome any additions and amendments.

*Jessica L. Colbert*

**Controlled Vocabularies**


Developed by the Kinsey Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University to describe its own collections. Largely limited to medical and psychiatric terminology.


Originally commissioned in 1975 by the Business and Professional Women’s Foundation. A superthesaurus combining 35 extant indices of terminology pertaining to women, most developed by academic women’s studies programs. Informed by Marshall (1977) but does not incorporate LCSH.


Presumably developed to describe HIC collection. Unclear if it is in use, as collections are currently closed to the public. Unpublished. Contact Tangent Group – Homosexual Information Center, 8721 Santa Monica Blvd., Ste. 37, West Hollywood, CA 90069, (818) 527-5442, [www.tangentgroup.org](http://www.tangentgroup.org).


A list updated every month of queer-related LCSH developed by cataloger Netanel Ganin. Includes “Use For” headings.


Hennepin County Library. (1979) Cumulative authority list - Hennepin County Library. Edina, Minnesota: Hennepin County Library.

*Hennepin County Library Authority File Entries* [computer file]. Minnetonka, MN: Hennepin County Library.


Presumably developed to describe HIC collection. Unclear if it is in use, as collections are currently closed to the public. Unpublished. Contact Tangent Group – Homosexual Information Center, 8721 Santa Monica Blvd., Ste. 37, West Hollywood, CA 90069, (818) 527-5442, [www.tangentgroup.org](http://www.tangentgroup.org).


A reworking and complement to then-extant LCSH pertaining to women. Follows LCSH structure; notes significant deviations from LCSH. Produced with a grant from the Council on Library Resources under the auspices and with the collaboration of the SRRT Task Force on Women’s Committee on Sexism in Subject Headings (convened Spring 1974).


Developed while Michel was a graduate student at the University of Illinois, based on book and periodical sources.

Developed to describe the Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand. Referenced in Parkinson 1998. Unpublished. Contact the Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand (LAGANZ), P.O. Box 11-695, Manners Street, Wellington 6142, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, +64-4-474-3000, [www.laganz.org.nz](http://www.laganz.org.nz)


Bilingual (Dutch/English) thesaurus developed to describe the collections of the HOMODOK and the Anna Blamanhuis (now the Internationale Homo-en Lebisch Informatiecentrum en Archief).

**Classification Schemes**


Unpublished. Contact William Way LGBT Community Center, 1315 Spruce St., Philadelphia, PA, 19107, (215) 732-2220, [info@waygay.org](mailto:info@waygay.org), [www.waygay.org](http://www.waygay.org).


Michel: “This scheme is based on the International Gay and Lesbian Archives Classification System of David Moore [1985], but during its creation, all the other schemes mentioned above were consulted … It divides the gay/lesbian world into useful classes rather than modifying regular library classifications. It includes separate classes for fiction and biography and offers LC cuttering for author numbers. While designed for use in a specific library, the Baker Library of the ONE Institute … it should be of use to other collections as well. Revisions were made in 1990 based on two years of use.”


Michel: “Nine major classes, with geographic, religious, and form subdivisions.” Developed to describe the International Gay & Lesbian Archives, based on Jim Kepner’s personal collection; the collection merged with ONE in 1994. See Kepner 1998. Unpublished. Contact Dee Michel, 95 Ridgewood Terrace, Northampton, MA 01060, (413) 303-0489, deeamichel@comcast.net


Michel: “While designed as an elaboration of the HQ 76 area of the Library of Congress Classification, the system could be used to stand on its own, by simply using the numbers Moore [1985] has created after the decimal point.”

**Bibliographies and Indices**


**Encyclopedias**


**Secondary Literature**


“Perhaps the greatest power of folksonomies, especially when set against controlled vocabularies like the Library of Congress Subject Headings, lies in their capacity to empower user communities to name their own resources in their own terms. This article analyzes the potential and limitations of both folksonomies and controlled vocabularies for transgender materials by analyzing the subject headings in WorldCat records and the user-generated tags in LibraryThing for books with transgender themes. A close examination of the subject headings and tags for twenty books on transgender topics reveals a disconnect between the language used by people who own these books and the terms authorized by the Library of Congress and assigned by catalogers to describe and organize transgender-themed books. The terms most commonly assigned by users are far less common or non-existent in WorldCat. The folksonomies also provide spaces for a multiplicity of representations, including a range of gender expressions, whereas these entities are often absent from Library of Congress Subject Headings and WorldCat. While folksonomies are democratic and respond quickly to shifts and expansions of
categories, they lack control and may inhibit findability of resources. Neither tags nor subject headings are perfect systems by themselves, but they may complement each other well in library catalogs. Bringing users’ voices into catalogs through the addition of tags might greatly enhance organization, representation, and retrieval of transgender-themed materials.”


“This section includes eighty-six short original essays commissioned for the inaugural issue of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*. Written by emerging academics, community-based writers, and senior scholars, each essay in this special issue, “Postposttranssexual: Key Concepts for a Twenty-First-Century Transgender Studies,” revolves around a particular keyword or concept. Some contributions focus on a concept central to transgender studies; others describe a term of art from another discipline or interdisciplinary area and show how it might relate to transgender studies. While far from providing a complete picture of the field, these keywords begin to elucidate a conceptual vocabulary for transgender studies. Some of the submissions offer a deep and resilient resistance to the entire project of mapping the field terminologically; some reveal yet-unrealized critical potentials for the field; some take existing terms from canonical thinkers and develop the significance for transgender studies; some offer overviews of well-known methodologies and demonstrate their applicability within transgender studies; some suggest how transgender issues play out in various fields; and some map the productive tensions between trans studies and other interdisciplines.”


“The purpose of this paper is to highlight limits to the dominant model of social inclusion under which UK public libraries operate, to analyze how and to what extent processes of socio-cultural exclusion emerge in the subject representation and discoverability of “non-dominant” resources in public library OPACs, and to consider folksonomy as a solution to any issues raised.”


In the original 1971 text, Berman goes through many problematic subject headings and suggests fixes for them. In this 1993 reprint, he includes a preface discussing some of the changes that have been made, and even though he is more than proud of the work he has accomplished, he recognizes that there is still much more work to be done and that there probably always will be. The bias he demonstrates moves beyond LGBT topics and shows that the system really does benefit and privilege the societal norm.

“The Library of Congress (LC) and the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) interpretation of Resource Description and Access (RDA) 9.7 regarding gender when identifying persons reinforces regressive conceptions of gender identity. The rule instructs catalogers to record gender when identifying persons, and although RDA gives catalogers the flexibility to record more than two gender labels, LC limits Name Authority Cooperative Program (NACO) catalogers to a binary label: male, female, or not known. In this article, the authors challenge gender as a descriptive attribute for personal names, critique how LC is instructing NACO catalogers to record elements about gender, and make recommendations to address describing persons in LC authority records.”


“The results of a small qualitative study of gay and lesbian information users suggest that facet analysis as it is increasingly practiced in the field of information architecture provides a promising avenue for improving information access to gay and lesbian information resources. Findings indicated that gay and lesbian information users have an acute sense of categorization grounded in the need to identify gay-positive physical and social spaces, and in their finely-honed practices of detecting gay “facets” to general information themes. They are also, however, very flexible and adaptable in their application of gay-related facet values, which suggests that browsing systems will have to be designed with considerable care.”


“This work outlines theoretical and methodological problems in documenting lesbigay history. In particular, chapters on problems in lesbigay research, separatism, and biases created by gender bias bring together feminist-radical perspectives on library history.”


“In 1990 Ellen Greenblatt published a study of gay- and lesbian-related terms in the Library of Congress Subject Headings. No such study has been published since, nor has such a study been conducted on the Library of Congress Classification system. This article returns to Greenblatt’s LCSH study to see what progress has been made in the last two decades, then uses her study as a template to examine gay- and lesbian-related terminology in LCC. Greenblatt’s objections to then-current headings are examples of a tension defined in the research of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and later Grant Campbell:
between a "universalizing view," which values unmarked representation of all parts of the population as a whole, and a "minoritizing view" like Greenblatt's, which values visibility for the minority "at any cost." Catalogers and classificationists should be aware of this tension and respectful of current preferred usage of the minority group being represented.”


“Located in the Vancouver apartment of gay liberation activist and retired professional librarian Ron Dutton, the BC Gay and Lesbian Archives continues to be a major repository of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) historical materials in British Columbia, Canada, after 40 years of activity. This paper draws on ethnographic fieldwork to examine the motivations behind, perceptions of and activities associated with maintaining the BC Gay and Lesbian Archives as a “semipublic” organization that provides archival services for the public in a private home. By creating a textured account of the BC Gay and Lesbian Archives as a home-based organization, this paper articulates an LGBT, community-based approach to archiving. The findings demonstrate that locating an archives in a private home involves a constant negotiation between issues of the public/private divide of what is considered accessible and inaccessible, sustainable and unsustainable, safe and unsafe. This article also articulates how home-based archiving more broadly challenges the divide between personal and institutional archives and contributes to scholarship pertaining to personal, autonomous, grassroots and social movement archives.”


“This study examines the mainstreaming of pornography in the context of current economic, popular culture, and academic trends. As pornography becomes part of popular culture, it simultaneously becomes an area of focus for academics and therefore presents particular challenges for college and university libraries. Both physically and conceptually, academic libraries must find a place for pornography on the shelves and in the array of knowledge structured by bibliographic access systems. This study looks at how the variety of issues, concepts, and genres of pornography considered in academic discourse could be accommodated within access systems by examining the way in which the adult industry itself classifies pornographic films. Specifically, the terms used by the adult industry to classify these films could be grouped within newly developed categories. The identification of the categories would not be predicated on characteristics of porn films alone. Instead, the categories would encompass specific topics, concepts, and subject areas that connect pornography to mainstream culture. Using classifications from four different adult industry sources, four sample categories are presented that could
serve as a model for how pornographic concepts could be accommodated within existing bibliographic access systems.”


“Pornography has become part of mainstream culture. As such, it has become a subject of academic research, and this, in turn, has implications for university libraries. Focusing on adult Internet pornography, this study suggests that academic libraries should provide access to adult pornographic Web sites by including them in their online catalogs.”


“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.”


“This article evaluates representation of transgender people and experiences in Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH). It compares LCSH treatment of transgender topics to that of controlled vocabularies developed to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) collections, as well as their treatment by scholarly LGBT encyclopedias. The appraisal of these knowledge domains demonstrates the continued relevance of subject descriptors as a mode of knowledge production both for information professionals and for those we serve. It also suggests strategies available to librarians to render transgender people more visible and accessible in library catalogs, including incorporating new technologies as well as modifying established cataloging instruments.”


“This study examines whether gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender-specific subject headings are being assigned to young adult and adult fiction in five urban Canadian public libraries, what these subject headings are, and how consistently they are applied. The study also compares findings for YA and adult fiction with main and secondary GLBT characters.

Olson, H. A. (2011). The Power to Name: Locating the Limits of Subject Representation in Libraries. Springer, Middletown, DE.


http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1182&context=libphilprac

“Catalogers have always had to balance adherence to cataloging rules and authority files with creating cataloging that is current and relevant to users. That dilemma has been complicated in new ways because of user demands in the world of Web 2.0. Standardized cataloging is crucial for communication between computer systems, but patrons now have an expectation of social interaction on the Internet, as evidenced by the popularity of folksonomy. After a description of traditional subject cataloging and folksonomy, this article discusses several institutions where subject cataloging is still used, but where
patron interaction is also encouraged. User-generated tags can coexist with controlled vocabulary such as subject headings.”


“This compilation of witty, insightful, and readable writings on the various aspects of alternative librarianship edited by two outspoken library professionals is a sequel to "Revolting Librarians", which was published in 1972.”


“In traditional library cataloging models, hierarchical taxonomic and classification structures are used to describe pieces of information. These schemas are lacking in any sort of mechanism to acknowledge people’s sometimes amorphous and often fluid identities. This paper will specifically address Library of Congress-based cataloging practices, including classification, and their role in enforcing normative boundaries for queer sexualities and gender. Through the use of inaccurate language in the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and problematic classification schemes, catalogers often unwittingly contribute to the creation of library environments that are passively hostile to transgender users.”