Tackling Embedded Bias in Resource Descriptions through User Feedback and User-Driven Metadata

Savannah Lake and Joseph Nicholson[*]

Introduction

Within libraries, there is a growing recognition that cataloging practices can involve problematic, offensive content description.[1] Subject vocabularies, in particular, have a decades-long history of perpetuating bigoted and offensive language and beliefs about marginalized and under-resourced groups,[2] leaving a troubled descriptive legacy in catalogs and search systems that librarians and archivists have recently attempted to address through reparative metadata initiatives. Yet while library working groups focused on remediating subject terminology and other descriptive language often include members of affected groups, reparative work has not always been grounded in feedback gathered from users from marginalized communities about how they would like to be described. Similarly, literature on reparative metadata work has largely focused on implementing subject language changes devised by librarians rather than on gathering feedback directly from affected communities about the terms they would prefer to use to describe themselves.

Two faculty members at Atkins Library at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte sought to address these challenges by developing a research study in which library users shared direct feedback on terminology they feel is respectful and representative of their identities. Funded by a campus Inclusive Excellence Grant, our goal was to develop more respectful and representative cataloging practices that were directly informed by library users of affected communities, not prescribed by librarians.

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Literature Review

There exists much in the literature about the necessity of evaluating and remediating descriptive resources for outdated or offensive terminology,[3] as well as case studies of specific metadata reparative efforts and resources.[4] The cataloging community at large has shown widespread commitment to this work; nearly ten years ago, an OCLC study of research libraries found that seventy percent of survey respondents indicated that they planned to change metadata descriptions in search and discovery interfaces to align with equity, diversity, and inclusion goals.[5] Such work reflects a growing recognition that the standards by which metadata quality and completeness have been traditionally valued—completeness, accuracy, consistency, interoperability—have largely neglected the qualitative dimension of metadata:[6] specifically, the ways in which an increasingly diverse group of users may not see themselves reflected or accurately represented in resource descriptions.[7] Such shortcomings, in addition to ostracizing groups of users, can also undermine effective discovery for all users, by virtue of relying on outmoded and outdated terminology.

Despite this widespread commitment to use more representative and respectful language in descriptive practices, there exists only a handful of studies attempting to gather feedback from users and communities about the terminology they use to describe themselves. These studies largely use some combination of surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups, directed at times to library users, and at others to expert researchers on these topics. A study by Moulaison-Sandy et al, for example, directly spoke with readers identifying as being part of the LGBTQIA+ community about LGBTQIA+ terminology,[8] whereas a study from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign interviewed faculty in the Department of Gender and Women's Studies.[9] Both studies displayed shortcomings with the current LCSH subject term "Sexual minorities," with participants suggesting other terms for what they use to describe and find resources about the LGBTQIA+ community.[10, 11] A study from Texas Lutheran University similarly interviewed nine scholars of disability studies, as opposed to people actively identifying as having a disability, ultimately finding that most study participants do not regularly use subject headings in their research, citing a lack of specific terms or terms that speak to the social, rather than medical, perspective of disabilities.[12]

Perhaps most robust in user- and community-centered feedback on descriptive practices are the case studies related to Indigenous peoples. At the University of British Columbia, for example, a study on Indigenous knowledge organization in library systems utilized focus groups, interviewing First Nations, Métis, and Aboriginal graduate students to learn more about their experience with library systems.[13] A study from the University of Nevada, Reno also used a focus group of Indigenous members of the university on a number of collection issues, including descriptive cataloging.[14] Alternatively, University of Denver Libraries surveyed and interviewed librarians and staff at tribal libraries to analyze the subject heading "Indians of North America."[15] Feedback from all three studies highlighted problems with subject headings, including the need for terms for specific tribal entities[16,17] and the derogatory nature of the term "Indians."[18] While not a formalized study, a case study from Cornell University Library explored updating the subject heading "Iroquois Indians" via community feedback. Here, librarians emailed Indigenous community members for feedback, resulting in a proposed change to the Library of Congress to "Haudenosaunee (North American People)."[19] This practice of soliciting feedback from community organizations and community scholars aligns with development of several cataloging resources for Indigenous materials, such as the Mashantucket Pequot Thesaurus of American Indian Terminology,[20] Māori Subject Headings,[21] and the First Nations House of Learning Subject Headings.[22]

There is undoubtedly widespread interest in updating descriptive practices to be more current, representative, and inclusive. This can often mean devising local solutions for outdated subject headings, as libraries wait for the Library of Congress to formalize updates. Nevertheless, there continues to be a dearth of literature focused on the terminology that members of underrepresented communities use for themselves and on how they would like to be represented in bibliographic records. This study intends to help redress this imbalance by foregrounding feedback from affected communities rather than the reparative metadata efforts of librarians, who

may not always understand the nuances, histories, and common practices related to community terminology or how the subject terms they use to describe underrepresented groups in search systems are seen by members of those groups. The hope is that studies like this one can assist libraries in designing reparative approaches more securely anchored in user needs and perspectives.

Methods

We conducted the study in two phases: a campus-wide survey about preferred identity terminology and a series of in-person semi-structured interviews. Through this two-pronged approach, we aimed to gain feedback from a broad portion of the campus community (through the survey) while also hearing more detailed, nuanced feedback on these topics (through the interviews). The research team consisted of two librarians, the metadata librarian and the digital scholarship librarian, as well as an undergraduate student assistant to aid in generating the interview transcripts. The study was supported by a UNC Charlotte Inclusive Excellence Grant.

Planning for the study took place in fall 2023, with the survey disseminated and interviews conducted in February through March 2024 and results analyzed thereafter. During the planning phase for the study, we prioritized seeking feedback on the study design from multiple sources. This included campus partners (such as the Office of Identity, Equity, and Engagement and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion) as well as members of the Descriptive Practices Working Group at Atkins Library. We also shared the study design with the library usability team, who is responsible for the majority of the user testing conducted within the library.

Campus-wide Survey

In February 2024, a Qualtrics survey was distributed to a fifty percent sample of the campus community of approximately 33,000 people (29,600 students and 3,700 faculty and staff).[23] We ultimately received 354 survey responses, for a response rate of approximately 2.15 percent. The survey itself consisted of questions asking respondents to select demographics they identified with, and then based on those responses, survey respondents were shown a list of several terms related to those identities. From there, they were asked to rank those terms in order of preference. The options for the various identity terms included the default FAST (Faceted Application of Subject Terminology) and LCSH (Library of Congress Subject Headings) term, as well as alternative terms proposed within the library community from various sources such as Problem LCSH,[24] Homosaurus,[25] Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia,[26] Triangle Research Libraries Network,[27] and members of our Descriptive Practices group (see Table 1).

TABLE 1		
Identity Terms Included in the Campus-Wide Survey		
Identities	Corresponding LCSH and FAST Term(s)	Terms Survey Respondents Ranked
Black or African American	African Americans Black people	African Americans
		Black (capitalized)
		black (not capitalized)
		Other (user-supplied term)
Hispanic	Hispanic Americans	Hispanic
		Latino/a
		Latine
		Latinx
		Other (user-supplied term)

TABLE 1		
Identity Terms Included in the Campus-Wide Survey		
Identities	Corresponding LCSH and FAST Term(s)	Terms Survey Respondents Ranked
2 or more races	Racially mixed people	Biracial
		Multiracial
		Racially mixed
		Other (user-supplied term)
Middle Eastern	Middle Eastern Americans	Middle Eastern
		Near Eastern
		North African
		West Asian
		Other (user-supplied term)
Native American or Alaska Native	Indians of North America	Native American
		Indigenous
		Indians of North America
		Other (user-supplied term)
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	Hawaiians Pacific Islanders	Native Hawaiian
		Hawaiian
		Pacific Islander
		Other (user-supplied term)
LGBTQIA+	Sexual minorities	LGBTQ+ people
		Queer community
		Sexual minorities
		Other (user-supplied term)

In addition to collecting feedback on identity term preferences, the survey also served as a recruitment tool for the semi-structured interviews that followed, as survey respondents could volunteer to participate in that phase of the study at the end of the survey. Of the 354 survey respondents, 194 volunteered to participate in the semi-structured interviews. Given our resources, we planned to conduct twelve semi-structured interviews. Accordingly, we were limited to studying three demographic backgrounds through the semi-structured interviews, as we wanted at least four perspectives per background. To determine which demographics we would further study through the semi-structured interviews, we began by reviewing the most frequently represented identities within the responses, which would suggest a strong campus representation. Then, we reviewed which identities had LCSH and FAST subject terms that the cataloging community at large had been suggesting alternative terms for. With these two lenses in mind, the demographic backgrounds we selected for additional study via the semi-structured interviews were LGBTQIA+, multiracial, and Hispanic, with the corresponding FAST terms being "Sexual minorities," "Racially mixed people," and "Hispanic Americans."

Semi-structured Interviews

From the 194 survey respondents who volunteered for the in-person study, we selected twelve participants to whom we had assigned "super" or "intermediate" user status based on the reported frequency of their past

library catalog use and their use of subject headings in searches. Users with substantial searching experience were selected over less seasoned searchers because we believed that they were more likely to offer nuanced and detailed perspectives on library metadata. Three groups of five "super" or "intermediate" users belonging to each of the identity groups considered in this study were recruited for the in-person sessions (see Table 2). The selected volunteers were contacted via email and invited to participate in interview sessions that took place in a library conference room adjacent to a major student study area in Atkins Library during regular business hours. To preserve their anonymity, the interviewees were assigned codenames for the study consisting of "Atkins" and a number: "Atkins 1," "Atkins 2," etc. Interviewees received a $100 online gift card for participating in this phase of the study, sent through the service Giftogram.

TABLE 2				
Participants for the Semi-Structured Interviews				
Interviewee	Community	Library Catalog Usage	Subject Search Usage	Campus Affiliation
Atkins 1	Hispanic	31+ times	No	Graduate
Atkins 2	Hispanic	31+ times	Yes	Undergraduate
Atkins 3	Hispanic	11-30 times	Yes	Undergraduate
Atkins 4	Hispanic, Multiracial	11-30 times	Yes	Undergraduate
Atkins 5	Multiracial	31+ times	Yes	Undergraduate
Atkins 6	Hispanic	11-30 times	Yes	Undergraduate
Atkins 7	Multiracial, LGBTQIA+	31+ times	Yes	Undergraduate
Atkins 8	Multiracial	11-30 times	Yes	Undergraduate
Atkins 9	LGBTQIA+	31+ times	Yes	Undergraduate
Atkins 10	Multiracial, LGBTQIA+	31+ times	Yes	Undergraduate
Atkins 11	LGBTQIA+	31+ times	Yes	Graduate
Atkins 12	LGBTQIA+	31+ times	No	Staff

The in-person sessions had two parts, a question-and-answer portion in which interviewees were asked questions about mockups of metadata records with differing subject terminology and descriptive language, and a hands-on exercise in which interviewees ranked a group of subject terms from best to worst in terms of how appropriate, sensitive, and accurate they were for the identity group described. A semi-structured interview format was used for the in-person sessions because it facilitates conversations that are tightly organized and yet permit a full exploration of a given topic within certain constraints.[28] The cataloging mockups and the hands-on exercise were created from screenshots of catalog records in Atkins Library's Primo discovery interface, each of which was manipulated in the underlying Alma database to display different versions of subject terminology and descriptive language. The screenshots were transferred to a PowerPoint presentation that the interviewees clicked through on a library laptop, guided by prompts from the study administrators.

The question-and-answer portion of the instrument consisted of twelve questions with follow-ups related to the catalog record mockups. Each record mockup created for the study had a summary note or contents note (or both) with descriptive language about the identity group (see appendix). Interviewees were first shown a version of a catalog record of a resource about the identity group with which they identified without subject headings and asked to comment on the descriptive language. They were also asked to describe the subject matter of the resource in their own words based on information in the mockup. Next, interviewees were presented

with different mockups of the same record, this time with varying subject headings for the same identity group. A mockup with the current LCSH term for the group appeared first in the sequence, followed by mockups with terms from alternative subject terms from vocabularies such as Homosaurus. Interviewees were asked to evaluate each subject term they were shown in terms of appropriateness and sensitivity and to state which of the terms they preferred and why. Additionally, interviewees were asked to comment on mockups with subject terms for the demographic group with which the resource creator identifies and a note with boilerplate language alerting users that the resource itself has sensitive or disturbing content that some may find upsetting.

In the hands-on study portion, two screenshots of catalog records for two additional resources were shown to interviewees, accompanied by manipulable text boxes containing different vocabulary terms and an empty box in which interviewees could enter alternative subject terms of their own creation if they wished (see appendix). The subject terms provided were the same as those shown to interviewees in earlier catalog record mockups. During the hands-on activity, interviewees arranged the boxes with subject terms in order from best to worst (top to bottom) in terms of appropriateness and sensitivity, then responded to questions about the reasons for their rankings. The intent of the exercise was to have interviewees confirm their subject term preferences in a more fixed form. The PowerPoints with the interviewees' subject term rankings were saved after each session was completed. The audio from the sessions was then transcribed and loaded into NVivo, where we coded and analyzed participant responses.

Findings

The primary goal of the study was to give library users the opportunity to advise on terms about their communities, to ground cataloging practices in user feedback and ultimately make records more relevant, discoverable, and representative of our users. The data and feedback we gathered demonstrated some key preferences, as well as the nuanced and ambiguous nature of several of the terms.

Identity Terms

HISPANIC

Appropriate terminology for members of the Hispanic community has been a complex, sensitive issue for some time now, both within libraries and in the larger culture. The newer term "Latinx" has become used more frequently, particularly in academia, but a Pew Research Center survey raised doubts about its acceptance among community members themselves, revealing that one in four have heard the term but only three percent use it.[29] Interviews and survey results in this study revealed some of these same fault lines. In both the campus-wide survey and the semi-structured interviews, respondents largely expressed a preference for the terms "Hispanic Americans" and "Latino/a Americans." Within the campus-wide survey, respondents were asked to rank identity terms in order of preference, from most to least preferred. Results displayed a preference for the terms "Latino/a" and "Hispanic" over the terms "Latinx" and "Latine," with 42 survey responses ranking "Latino/a" as the most preferred (receiving an averaged ranking of 1.7) and Hispanic (with an averaged ranking of 2.1). Latinx and Latine follow a full point after, at 3.3 and 3.7, respectively (see Table 3). Similarly, within the semi-structured interviews, interviewees generally spoke favorably about these two terms, describing the term "Hispanic Americans" as "broad" (Atkins 2), "grammatically correct" (Atkins 4), "neutral" (Atkins 6), and a "universally accepted term" (Atkins 3) and the term "Latino/a Americans" as "encompass[ing] all Latinos" (Atkins 1) and "what I've always used and what I've grown up with" (Atkins 2).

Interviewee responses to the terms "Latinx Americans" and "Latine Americans" ranged from neutral to mixed to negative. One interviewee said that while she would not use "Latinx" to describe herself, "if you call me by either one [Hispanic or Latinx], it wouldn't bother me at all" (Atkins 1). One interviewee

objected to "Latinx Americans" because it conflicts with grammar but liked "Latine Americans" for its inclusivity (Atkins 2), while another liked "Latinx Americans" for its inclusivity and was "not very acquainted" with the term "Latine Americans" (Atkins 3). The remaining two interviewees objected to both "Latinx Americans" and "Latine Americans," citing how the terms conflict with the Spanish language and are largely imposed by people outside of the Hispanic community: "I feel like a lot of Latin people don't use [Latinx], because it's sort of just, I don't know, it's Americans sort of put that onto the Latin people" (Atkins 4). Even the interviewee who liked the term "Latinx Americans" spoke to the idea that the term was coming from outside the community, saying "I have never heard anyone from my own community be concerned, or be insulted by the use of Latino or Latina over Latinx. But then again, I don't know everyone" (Atkins 3).

TABLE 3	
Average Rankings for Identity Terms in the Campus-Wide Survey, Where 1 is Most Preferred	
African American or Black	**58 responses**
Black (capitalized)	1.6
African American	2.2
black (not capitalized)	2.7
Other (user-supplied term)	3.5
Hispanic	**42 responses**
Latino/a	1.7
Hispanic	2.1
Latinx	3.3
Latine	3.7
Other (user-supplied term)	4.1
2 or more races	**13 responses**
Multiracial	1.9
Biracial	2.0
Racially mixed	2.6
Other (user-supplied term)	3.4
Middle Eastern	**12 responses**
Middle Eastern	1.6
West Asian	2.8
Near Eastern	3.0
North African	3.1
Other (user-supplied term)	4.5
LGBTQIA+	**104 responses**
LGBTQ+ people	1.5
Queer community	1.8
Sexual minorities	3.2
Other (user-supplied term)	3.6

TABLE 4	
Average Rankings for Identity Terms in the Hands-On Exercise in the Semi-Structured Interviews, Where 1 is Most Preferred	
Hispanic	
Hispanic Americans	2.1
Country-specific term (Dominican Americans or Mexican Americans)	2.9
Latino/a Americans	3.0
Latinx Americans	4.0
Chicano/a Americans	4.0
Latine Americans	4.4
Other (user-supplied term)	6.1
2 or more races	
Multiracial people	1.9
Racially mixed people	2.2
Biracial people	2.4
Other (user-supplied term)	3.5
LGBTQIA+	
LGBTQ+ people	1.4
Queer community	2.2
Queer people	3.1
Sexual minorities	4.1
Other (user-supplied term)	4.2

Within the hands-on activity, in addition to the identity terms previously displayed in the survey and interview, interviewees also evaluated more specific terminology. This included "Salvadoran Americans" for one bibliographic record as well as "Mexican Americans" and "Chicano/a Americans" for another. Interviewees responded positively to the country-specific terms of "Salvadoran Americans" and "Mexican Americans," with the term ranked overall as the second-most preferred term at 2.9, following "Hispanic Americans" at 2.1 and preceding "Latino/a Americans" at 3.0 (see Table 4). Interviewees ranked "Latinx Americans," "Chicano/a Americans," and "Latine Americans" lower, with scores of 4.0 or higher. All five interviewees seemed to not know what the term "Chicano/a Americans" meant, with three saying they were unfamiliar with the term (Atkins 2, 3, 6) and two misattributing the term (Atkins 1 and 4).

TWO OR MORE RACES

The inadequacy of available subject terminology for people from diverse racial backgrounds has been recognized for some time. "Racially mixed people," the former LCSH subject heading for multiracial people, was until early 2024 flagged on the "Problem LCSH" page maintained by Cataloging Lab "as outdated terminology."[30] Both Cataloging Lab and the African American SACO Funnel suggested that the term be replaced by "Multiracial people,"[31] a change that was implemented by the Library of Congress in June 2024,[32] several months after the interviews for this study were conducted.

Responses from interviewees who self-identified as multiracial lend support to this change. Though one interviewee, Atkins 4, preferred "racially mixed people," describing it as "more formal" than other terms, three others strongly objected to it on the grounds that it was "wordy" (Atkins 5), unfamiliar (Atkins 7), and potentially offensive (Atkins 8). Elaborating, Atkins 8 commented that the term had a connotation of "calling people mixed breeds and stuff like that." Interviewees who were critical of "racially mixed people" considered "multiracial people" a better choice than other subject terms they were shown on the grounds that it was "encompassing" (Atkins 8) and "more inclusive" (Atkins 10). Atkins 5 noted that the term represented the "broadest category" of people "while still kind of remaining concise," while Atkins 8 added that it was "less blunt" than "racially mixed people." Interviewees found "biracial people" a less acceptable term on account of what they perceived as its more limited, narrower scope, which they considered suitable for people of two races but not for those with more diverse racial backgrounds.

There was some variance in term rankings between the campus-wide survey and the hands-on activity in the semi-structured interviews. For the survey, 13 people responded, ranking "Multiracial" and "Biracial" as the most preferred terms with scores of 1.9 and 2.0, respectively. "Racially mixed" trailed farther behind at 2.6 (see Table 3). This differs from the averages from the hands-on activity, where the five respondents ranked "Multiracial people" first at 1.9, "Racially mixed people" second at 2.2, and "Biracial people" third at 2.4 (see Table 4). Common feedback for the hands-on activity was that the bibliographic records described books about people who had more than two racial or ethnic backgrounds, which possibly explains this variance.

LGBTQIA+

Available subject vocabulary for LGBTQ+-related topics has long been identified as problematic and inadequate, both within the community itself and in LIS literature.[33] The widespread adoption of Homosaurus,[34] expressly created for LGBTQ+-related topics, is an indication of the discontent with subject terms from traditional vocabularies in the library community and the hunger for alternatives. Responses from interviewees who self-identified as LGBTQ+ suggested the promise of newer subject terminologies while illustrating why descriptive terms for the community remain such a fraught, complex issue.

Interviewees unanimously preferred the Homosaurus term "LGBTQ+ people" (or slight variants thereof) to the other subject terms they were shown for their community, describing it as "broad" and "encompassing"

(Atkins 9), the "safest option" (Atkins 10), "the most broadly acceptable" (Atkins 11), and as a choice that "includes the entire community" (Atkins 12). Elaborating, Atkins 12 commented that the term is "more formal" and hence more appropriate for the library catalog. In the sorting exercises, all interviewees ranked it or variant terms including the descriptor "LGBTQ+" first.

The Homosaurus terms "Queer people" and "Queer community" received somewhat more qualified support from interviewees, several of whom, like Atkins 9 and Atkins 11, considered the terms appropriate for use with friends and other community members, but less suitable for the more formal setting of the library catalog. According to Atkins 9, "queer" is an inside-the-community term and thus "niche," or not sufficiently broad in scope for the catalog environment. The status of "queer" as a former slur that has been reclaimed by the community made Atkins 11 and Atkins 12 wary about its use as a subject term in catalog records, as they felt it may still have an offensive connotation for some users, such as older members of the LGBTQ+ community. Atkins 12 also considered the term objectionable on the grounds that it does not in their view include trans identities and is "specifically about sexuality." In the sorting exercise, interviewees ranked "queer community" and "queer people" in the middle range, after "LGBTQ+ people."

"Sexual minorities," the current LCSH term for people who identify with the LGBTQ+ community, was strongly deprecated during the question-and-answer session and ranked last in the sorting exercise by all interviewees who identified as LGBTQ+, though predominantly for reasons of unfamiliarity or perceived antiquatedness rather than for offensiveness. Noting that it seemed "old school," Atkins 7 described "sexual minorities" as a term "I just don't use." Similarly, Atkins 10 stated that "I've just never seen it, like, worded like that." Atkins 9 did note that the term seemed to place community members "in a category with a lot of other … types of sexualities … that people could label as deviant" but also emphasized the term's unfamiliar nature, explaining that "it wouldn't be the first thing I would think of" when searching. These findings parallel those of a similar recent study by Moulaison-Sandy et al, in which interviewees identifying as LGBTQ+ people found "sexual minorities" not so much offensive as odd and unfamiliar, and hence a term that was "likely not useful for retrieval."[35]

The campus-wide survey reflected similar sentiments for term preferences as the results from the semi-structured interviews. While the term "Queer people" was not included on the campus-wide survey, survey respondents ranked the LCSH term "Sexual minorities" and the Homosaurus terms "LGBTQ+ people" and "Queer community." The survey showed a clear preference for using "LGBTQ+ people" over the current LCSH term "Sexual minorities," having the largest differential between an alternative term and the LCSH term in the entire survey (see Table 3). 104 people responded to this portion of the survey, ranking "LGBTQ+ people" and "Queer community" as the most preferred terms at 1.5 and 1.8, respectively, followed by "Sexual minorities" at 3.2.

Author Demographics

In addition to questions about identity terms, interviewees were shown sample bibliographic records with and without added demographic information for the author (see appendix) in a 386 MARC field. Then, interviewees were asked if the added demographic information helped them better understand the resource being described and the people who created it. Generally, interviewees responded positively to the additional information, with eight of the twelve interviewees in favor of including the author's demographic information in bibliographic records and four interviewees expressing ambivalent or indifferent views.

Interviewees who supported including author demographic information in bibliographic records felt that for books and resources about a certain community, knowing that the author is from that community makes the resource "more credible and something that I would be more likely to read" (Atkins 2); "gives me more of a sense of trust that he wouldn't misrepresent it or something" (Atkins 3); and the resource "might be better than someone who is not speaking from experience" (Atkins 8). However, three of the interviewees who had been approving of author demographic information seemed to consider them acceptable based on the erroneous belief that they were selected by authors themselves.

Of the four interviewees who expressed ambivalence or indifference to including author demographic information, three of them identified as LGBTQIA+. These respondents expressed concern about the library outing or labeling someone, as well as the challenge of reckoning with non-stable identities: "It's a tricky thing, because then we could start just broadly labeling things. I mean if they don't self-identity, then I wouldn't" (Atkins 9). Generally, while there was broad consensus that including author demographic information would help library users better understand resources, there was concern and ambivalence surrounding the impacts of including such information on authors.

Sensitive Content Statement

An additional objective of the study was to understand how users view notes in library catalog records alerting users to resources that may contain offensive or disturbing content. At Atkins Library, such notes have been used selectively in metadata for certain resources in Goldmine, the digital asset management system for cultural heritage materials, but not in library catalog records, unless occasional MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) ratings in 521 fields in bibliographic records for motion pictures can be considered such.

To test out user responses, we added a boilerplate note advising users of sensitive content in a 500 field to mockups of bibliographic records containing 505 or 520 notes that indicated possibly disturbing or violent content. The mockups were shown to interviewees near the conclusion of the question-and-answer portion of the in-person session. The text of the note, which was placed below other bibliographic fields in the mockups, read as follows: "This resource contains descriptions of trauma and violence that may be disturbing to some readers" (see appendix). Interviewees were asked how the language in the note made them feel about using the resource and whether the note helped them better evaluate the risks of doing so. The study did not investigate the trickier issue of what criteria should be used when applying such notes to records or the potential ethical dilemma of library staff making value judgments about what resources may or may not be offensive or disturbing to users.

Interviewees from all three demographic groups in this study had uniformly positive views of the usefulness of sensitive content notes in records, describing them variously as a "good advisory" (Atkins 1), a "good precaution" (Atkins 2), and as an addition that helped them identify the risks of using a resource (Atkins 4). Even interviewees who stated that they were not sensitive to violent or traumatic content themselves said that such notes should be present "for people who are [sensitive]" (Atkins 5). Such people "will appreciate [the notes]," Atkins 6 stated. The only reservations expressed about the note concerned its placement in the record mockup, which three interviewees (Atkins 3, 9, and 12) stated should be higher, above the contents and summary note fields, and its language, which Atkins 8 and Atkins 9 considered insufficiently specific about the sensitive content in the resource.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study was that the semi-structured interviews were limited to twelve people, and in turn three demographic backgrounds. Interviewing more people could have meant larger sample sizes for each demographic background, as well as the ability to study additional communities. Further studies, in which library users directly comment on the terminology being used to describe them, would help the cataloging community at large remediate outdated metadata and create more fruitful, resonant, and representative search experiences for their users.

In conducting the semi-structured interviews for the study, we noted that several interviewees did not seem to have a true understanding of subject search, seeing subject terminology more as keywords to full-text search. Accordingly, some of the feedback received was to simply add more subject terms; Atkins 11, for example, said "it can never hurt to add more words, because it just makes things easier to find." In our initial selection of interviewees, we prioritized those who had said they used subject search, as well as that they had used the library

catalog frequently. However, for conducting similar studies in the future, it may be helpful to begin the semi-structured interviews with a brief explanation of subject search and its differences from keyword search.

Another limitation of this study relates to the constantly evolving nature of catalog description. After all, one of the subject terms explored, "Racially mixed people," was updated by the Library of Congress over the course of our study. While tentative and final updated lists of subject headings as well as summaries of recent decisions by the PTCP (Policy, Training, and Cooperative Programs Division of the Library of Congress) are made available regularly on the Library of Congress website[36] and on Classification Web, it can be quite challenging to keep abreast of the status of proposed changes to the catalog via various SACO funnels. More centralized and searchable resources on proposed changes could be a great aid in supporting cataloging work at libraries.

Conclusion

This study attempts to reach beyond the heavily siloed world of library metadata to gather direct feedback from users from several different communities on the subject language used to describe them in catalog records. Findings suggest that users from marginalized groups evaluate subject terms for their communities using complex criteria such as currentness, familiarity, formality, inclusiveness, acceptance within the community, and whether subject vocabulary corresponds to their own personal lexicon of terms they use to describe themselves. They want subject vocabulary describing their communities to be sensitive and inclusive, but they also view the library catalog as a formal setting in which more colloquial terminology, even when acceptable within their community, may not always be appropriate. Users from each group were approving of sensitive content warnings in records but divided on demographic subject terms for creators, with some regarding them as helpful in evaluating the credibility of resources about marginalized groups and others expressing concerns about misapplying them to creators who have not self-identified with the community they describe.

Despite its limitations, this study contributes to a small but growing body of research into issues of representation and inclusiveness in library metadata that seeks the involvement and perspective of user groups most directly impacted by legacy descriptive practices. Sometimes challenging and sometimes confirming librarians' assumptions about what language users find acceptable in descriptions of library resources, such feedback has the potential to help transform library metadata from a set of descriptive conventions imposed from above into a cooperative effort more reflective of libraries' increasingly diverse constituencies. As libraries continue to evaluate legacy metadata, more studies that invite user feedback and perspectives will be necessary to aid libraries in adopting user-centered cataloging approaches.

Appendix

Mockups that participants who identified as LGBTQIA+ reviewed in the semi-structured interviews, as part of the question-and-answer section

Initial record

Title	Queer spaces : an atlas of LGBTQIA+ places and stories
Author/Creator	Furman, Adam Nathaniel, (editor) >
Description	"An independent bookshop in Glasgow. An ice cream parlour in Havana, where strawberry is the queerest choice. A cathedral in ruins in Managua, occupied by the underground LGBTQIA+ community. Queer people have always found ways to exist and be together, and there will always be a need for queer spaces. In this lavishly illustrated volume, Adam Nathaniel Furman and Joshua Mardell have gathered together a community of contributors to share stories of spaces that range from the educational to the institutional to the re-appropriated, and many more besides. With historic, contemporary and speculative examples from around the world, Queer Spaces recognises LGBTQIA+ life past and present as strong, vibrant, vigorous, and worthy of its own place in history. " -- Publisher's description.
Contents	Domestic – Communal – Public.

Record with added LCSH term

Title	Queer spaces : an atlas of LGBTQIA+ places and stories
Author/Creator	Furman, Adam Nathaniel, (editor) >
Subjects	Sexual minorities -- History >
	Sexual minorities -- Identity >
Description	"An independent bookshop in Glasgow. An ice cream parlour in Havana, where strawberry is the queerest choice. A cathedral in ruins in Managua, occupied by the underground LGBTQIA+ community. Queer people have always found ways to exist and be together, and there will always be a need for queer spaces. In this lavishly illustrated volume, Adam Nathaniel Furman and Joshua Mardell have gathered together a community of contributors to share stories of spaces that range from the educational to the institutional to the re-appropriated, and many more besides. With historic, contemporary and speculative examples from around the world, Queer Spaces recognises LGBTQIA+ life past and present as strong, vibrant, vigorous, and worthy of its own place in history. " -- Publisher's description.
Contents	Domestic – Communal – Public.

Records with several alternative subject terms

Title	Queer spaces : an atlas of LGBTQIA+ places and stories
Author/Creator	Furman, Adam Nathaniel, (editor) >
Subjects	LGBTQ+ people -- History >
	LGBTQ+ people -- Identity >
Description	"An independent bookshop in Glasgow. An ice cream parlour in Havana, where strawberry is the queerest choice. A cathedral in ruins in Managua, occupied by the underground LGBTQIA+ community. Queer people have always found ways to exist and be together, and there will always be a need for queer spaces. In this lavishly illustrated volume, Adam Nathaniel Furman and Joshua Mardell have gathered together a community of contributors to share stories of spaces that range from the educational to the institutional to the re-appropriated, and many more besides. With historic, contemporary and speculative examples from around the world, Queer Spaces recognises LGBTQIA+ life past and present as strong, vibrant, vigorous, and worthy of its own place in history. " -- Publisher's description.
Contents	Domestic – Communal – Public.

Title	Queer spaces : an atlas of LGBTQIA+ places and stories
Author/Creator	Furman, Adam Nathaniel, (editor) >
Subjects	Queer community -- History >
	Queer community -- Identity >
Description	"An independent bookshop in Glasgow. An ice cream parlour in Havana, where strawberry is the queerest choice. A cathedral in ruins in Managua, occupied by the underground LGBTQIA+ community. Queer people have always found ways to exist and be together, and there will always be a need for queer spaces. In this lavishly illustrated volume, Adam Nathaniel Furman and Joshua Mardell have gathered together a community of contributors to share stories of spaces that range from the educational to the institutional to the re-appropriated, and many more besides. With historic, contemporary and speculative examples from around the world, Queer Spaces recognises LGBTQIA+ life past and present as strong, vibrant, vigorous, and worthy of its own place in history. " -- Publisher's description.
Contents	Domestic – Communal – Public.

Title	Queer spaces : an atlas of LGBTQIA+ places and stories
Author/Creator	Furman, Adam Nathaniel, (editor) >
Subjects	Queer people -- History >
	Queer people -- Identity >
Description	"An independent bookshop in Glasgow. An ice cream parlour in Havana, where strawberry is the queerest choice. A cathedral in ruins in Managua, occupied by the underground LGBTQIA+ community. Queer people have always found ways to exist and be together, and there will always be a need for queer spaces. In this lavishly illustrated volume, Adam Nathaniel Furman and Joshua Mardell have gathered together a community of contributors to share stories of spaces that range from the educational to the institutional to the re-appropriated, and many more besides. With historic, contemporary and speculative examples from around the world, Queer Spaces recognises LGBTQIA+ life past and present as strong, vibrant, vigorous, and worthy of its own place in history. " -- Publisher's description.
Contents	Domestic – Communal – Public.

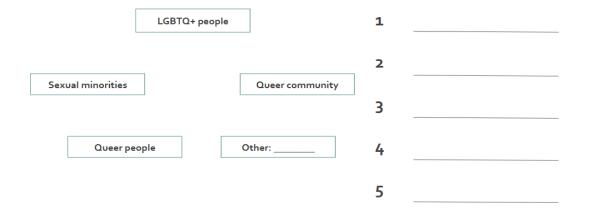Record with added demographic information for the author

Title	Queer spaces : an atlas of LGBTQIA+ places and stories
Author/Creator	Furman, Adam Nathaniel, (editor) >
Author Demographics	LGBTQ+ people >
Subjects	LGBTQ+ people -- History >
	LGBTQ+ people -- Identity >
Description	"An independent bookshop in Glasgow. An ice cream parlour in Havana, where strawberry is the queerest choice. A cathedral in ruins in Managua, occupied by the underground LGBTQIA+ community. Queer people have always found ways to exist and be together, and there will always be a need for queer spaces. In this lavishly illustrated volume, Adam Nathaniel Furman and Joshua Mardell have gathered together a community of contributors to share stories of spaces that range from the educational to the institutional to the re-appropriated, and many more besides. With historic, contemporary and speculative examples from around the world, Queer Spaces recognises LGBTQIA+ life past and present as strong, vibrant, vigorous, and worthy of its own place in history. " -- Publisher's description.
Contents	Domestic – Communal – Public.

Record with added sensitive content language

Title	Pink triangle legacies : coming out in the shadow of the Holocaust
Author/Creator	Newsome, W. Jake, 1987- author. >
Subjects	Gay liberation movement >
	Gay liberation movement -- United States -- History -- 20th century >
	Gays -- Germany -- Identity >
Description	"This book chronicles the seventy-five-year struggle for the acknowledgment and memorialization of the Nazis' LGBTQ victims. It simultaneously traces how LGBTQ people in Germany and the United States transformed the pink triangle from a Nazi concentration camp badge into an international symbol of queer identity and activism beginning in the 1970s"-- Provided by publisher.
Contents	Introduction : "Beaten to Death, Silenced to Death" -- "They are Enemies of the State!" : The Fate of LGBTQ People in Nazi Germany -- "For Homosexuals, the Third Reich Hasn't Ended Yet" : Paragraph 175 and the Nazi Past in West Germany -- "The Only Acceptable Gay Liberation Logo" : The Reclamation of the Pink Triangle in West Germany -- "It's a Scar, But In Your Heart" : The Pink Triangle in American Gay Activism -- "Remembrances of Things Once Hidden" : Piecing Together the Pink Triangle Past on Stage and on Page -- "We Died There, Too" : Commemoration and the Construction of a Transatlantic Gay Identity -- Epilogue : "Remembering Must Also Have Consequences.
Notes	This resource contains descriptions of trauma and violence that may be distressing to some readers. Includes bibliographical references and index.
Language	English
Publisher	Ithaca, New York ; London : Cornell University Press
Creation Date	2022
Format	1 online resource (304 p.) : 17 b&w halftones, 1 chart

Hands-on activity that participants who identified as LGBTQIA+ completed at the end of the semi-structured interviews, where they arranged subject terminology related to a bibliographic record from best to worst (top to bottom)

Title	The unfinished queer agenda after marriage equality
Author/Creator	DeFilippis, Joseph Nicholas, 1967- editor. >
	Jones, Angela, 1978- editor. >
	Yarbrough, Michael W., editor. >
Contents	What is "the queer agenda" / Paulina Helm-Hernandez, interviewed by Joseph Nicholas DeFilippis -- Anti-blackness and "the queer agenda" : post-conference reflections with Hari Ziyad / Hari Ziyad, interviewed by Angela Jones -- Systemic violence : reflections on the Pulse Nightclub massacre / Jennicet Gutie?rrez, Steven Thrasher, Paulina Helm-Herna?ndez, Greggor Matson, Salvador Vidal-Ortiz, Terry Roethlein, and Angela Jones -- Queering the trade : intersections of the sex worker and LGBTQ movements / Kate D'Adamo -- The tacit targeting of trans immigrants as "criminal aliens" : old tactics and new / Pooja Gehi and Gabriel Arkles -- Passing as experts in transgender medicine / Stef Shuster -- Who are the stewards of the aids archive : sharing the political weight of the intimate / Alexandra Juhasz and Theodore (Ted) Kerr -- LGBTQ youth and education : rethinking children's rights in schools / Ryan Thoreson -- "I want to be happy in life" : success, failure, and addressing LQBTQ youth homelessness / Brandon Andrew Robinson -- The anti-man aesthetic : the state of lgbtq political and social issues in guyana post marriage equality in the United States / Renatta Fordyce -- Queer Latinx American bodies in transnational contexts : case studies from Brazil, Chile, and Peru / Christopher Rivera and Lily Sanchez -- Deadly denial : queer poverty / Joseph Nicholas DeFilippis, Amber Hollibaugh, Cara Page, Paulina Helm-Herna?ndez -- Index.

LGBTQ+ people	1	_____
	2	_____
Sexual minorities Queer community	3	_____
Queer people Other: _____	4	_____
	5	_____

Title	Introduction to LGBTQ+ Studies : A Cross-Disciplinary Approach
Author/Creator	Amory, Deborah Peters, editor. >
Description	Introduction to LGBTQ+ Studies offers accessible, academically sound information on a wide range of topics, including history, culture, and Queer Theory; an exploration of LGBTQ+ relationships, families, parenting, health, and education; and how to conduct research on LGBTQ+ topics. The book explores LGBTQ+ issues from the ancient world to contemporary global perspectives. Employing an intersectional analysis, the textbook highlights how sexuality and gender are simultaneously experienced and constructed through other structures of inequality and privilege, such as race and class. The text supports multiple learning styles by integrating visual elements, multimedia resources, discussion and project prompts, and resources for further research throughout the textbook.
Contents	Acknowledgments -- Introduction -- Part I. Theoretical Foundations -- Part II: Global Histories -- Part III: U.S. Histories -- Part IV: Prejudice and Health -- Part V: Relationships, Families, and Youth -- Part VI: Culture -- Part VII: Research.

| Queer people | | **1** | _____ |

Form layout:

Boxes: Queer people | LGBTQ+ people | Other: _____ | Queer community | Sexual minorities

Numbered blanks:
1 _____
2 _____
3 _____
4 _____
5 _____

Notes

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