The Critical Catalog: Using a Design Prototype to Address Problematic Metadata

Rachel Ivy Clarke & Sayward Schoonmaker
The need for diversity

Diversity is a core value of American librarianship
- Access to resources for diverse communities
- Access to and promotion of resource from diverse populations

But how to provide access to these materials?
## Field scan findings

Which schema have access points for gender?

### Creator elements

### Resource elements

Prevalence of what we named “basket elements”

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<th>Archival Framework</th>
<th>Dublin Core</th>
<th>FOAF</th>
<th>GoodReads.com</th>
<th>MARC Authority</th>
<th>Novelist</th>
<th>Poetry Foundation</th>
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*Indicates elements that combine creator elements

<sup>1</sup> Creator’s gender is only for internal use.

Table 2
Field scan findings

Issues with Gender as Access Point:

- Binary/Treatment of identity as fixed/immutable
- Traditionally not intended for use as access point, but for disambiguation (libraries)
- Information related to gender is unstandardized and may appear in various elements/fields
- Existing labels are entangled, inconsistent, and/or applied at varying levels of specificity
- Stereotyping creators/works & pejorative labeling
- Creator’s choice of identification
Designing a new catalog

Using existing identity-based access points
- Continued perpetuation of existing issues and harms

Using critical design to “flip the script”
- A specific form of activist inquiry using the creation of provocative artifacts to challenge assumptions, encourage people to shift perspectives, and think in new ways
Flipping the script

Cataloging objectives:
- Find
- Identify
- Select
- Obtain
- Express

Instead of labeling “diverse” materials, what if we label materials created by or about cisgender white able-bodied heteronormative men?
Purposes & goals

Prevent perpetuation of inaccurate and harmful labeling
Surface power imbalances by destabilizing the default norm
Support intersectionality
1. All systems red / Martha Wells.
   by Wells, Martha [author.].
   Material type: Text; Format: print ; Literary form: Fiction
   Publisher: New York : Tom Doherty Associates, 2017
   Copyright date: ©2017
   Availability: Items available for loan: Library of Criticality (1).
   Place hold  Log in to add tags.  Add to your cart

   by Butler, Octavia E.
   Material type: Text; Format: print ; Literary form: Fiction
   Publisher: New York : Seven Stories Press, c1998
   Availability: Items available for loan: Library of Criticality (1).
   Place hold  Add to your cart

   by Hopkinson, Nalo.
   Material type: Text; Format: print ; Literary form: Fiction
   Online access: Contributor biographical information | Publisher description
   Availability: Items available for loan: Library of Criticality (1).
   Place hold  Add to your cart

   by Lai, Larissa.
   Material type: Text; Format: print ; Literary form: Fiction
   Publisher: Toronto : Thomas Allen Publishers, c2002
   Availability: Items available for loan: Library of Criticality (1).
Some MARC fields are not currently indexed in ILSs

Searching by exclusion (e.g. excluding white heteronormative male creators) requires a positive (e.g. diverse materials still require labeling)

The relevance algorithm
Solution!

His Excellency: George Washington / Joseph J. Ellis.

By: Ellis, Joseph J.

Material type: Text

Publisher: New York : Vintage Books, 2005


Description: xiv, 320 p. : ill. ; 21 cm.


Subject(s): Washington, George, 1732-1799 | Presidents -- United States -- Biography | Generals -- United States -- Biography

Online resources: Contributor biographical information | Publisher description | Sample text
Solution?

His Excellency: (Record no. 48280)

[ view plain ]

000 -LEADER
fixed length 01509cam a2200373 a 4500
control field

001 - CONTROL NUMBER
control field 14242762

003 - CONTROL NUMBER IDENTIFIER
control field Klassmates

005 - DATE AND TIME OF LATEST TRANSACTION
control field 20190909144631.0

008 - FIXED-LENGTH DATA ELEMENTS--GENERAL INFORMATION
fixed length 0601271619nja b 081-0beng d
control field

010 ## - LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CONTROL NUMBER
LC control 2006272139
number

020 - ELEMENTAL STANDARD BOOK NUMBER
What did we learn?

Stark disconnect between metadata and system functionality
- Beholden to system no matter the quality of your metadata

Not providing implementable solutions but opening structural space
- Reimagining systems and models that incorporate self-identity
  - E.g. folksonomies, WikiData
- Rethinking the objectives of cataloging
  - E.g. intentional expressivity
- Revising long-standing principles and canons of classification
  - E.g. canons of permanence
- Redefining “diversity” and “diverse materials”
  - E.g. Lawrence 2020, 2021
Thanks for listening!

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Dunne, A. and Raby, F. (n.d.) “Critical Design FAQ.” http://www.dunneandraby.co.uk/content/bydandr/13/0


