

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

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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”

Creator Elements Labels	Anchor Archive	Diverse BookFinder	Dublin Core	FOAF	GoodReads.com	MARC Authority	NoveList	Poetry Foundation	Queer Cartoonists Database	Queer Comics Database	RDA	Schema.org	We Need Diverse Books
Affiliation				X		X					X	X	
Age				X		X		X	X		X	X	
Basket Element						X	X						
Culture							X						
Disability													
Ethnicity									X*				X*
Gender				X		X	X	X ₁	X		X	X	
Geographical Region						X		X	X		X		
Honorific				X								X	
Language						X					X	X	
Level													
Nationality							X		X*			X	
Occupation						X			X		X	X	
Pronoun									X				
Race													X*
Religion													
Sexuality													
Social Conditions													
Tribe-Nation													

*Indicates elements that combine creator elements

₁ 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
- Describe
- 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

Search

Library catalog

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[Okorafor, Nnedi,](#)
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Item types

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Series

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[The Gregg Press scie...](#)
[The Murderbot diarie...](#)

Places

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[Outer space.](#)
[Toronto \(Ont.\)](#)

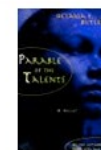
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- ☐ 1. **All systems red / Martha Wells.**
by Wells, Martha [author].
Edition: First edition.
Material type: Text; Format: print ; Literary form: **Fiction**
Publisher: New York : Tom Doherty Associates, 2017
Copyright date: ©2017
Availability: **Items available for loan:** Library of Criticality (1).
★★★★★
[Place hold](#) [Log in to add tags.](#) [Add to your cart](#)



- ☐ 2. **Parable of the talents : a novel / Octavia E. Butler.**
by Butler, Octavia E.
Edition: A Seven Stories Press 1st ed.
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](#)



- ☐ 3. **Brown girl in the ring / Nalo Hopkinson.**
by Hopkinson, Nalo.
Material type: Text; Format: print ; Literary form: **Fiction**
Publisher: New York : Warner Books, 1998
Online access: [Contributor biographical information](#) | [Publisher description](#)
Availability: **Items available for loan:** Library of Criticality (1).
★★★★★
[Place hold](#) [Add to your cart](#)



- ☐ 4. **Salt fish girl : a novel / Larissa Lai.**
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).
★★★★★



Problem!

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!

Search

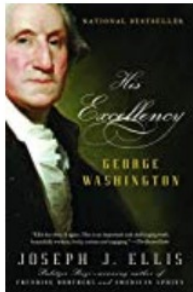
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[Home](#) > [Details for: His Excellency : George Washington /](#)



Normal view

MARC view

ISBD view

His Excellency : George Washington / Joseph J. Ellis.

By: [Ellis, Joseph J](#) 🔍

Material type: Text

Publisher: New York : [Vintage Books](#), 2005

Print

Add to your cart

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Edition: 1st Vintage Books ed.

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

ISBN: 1400032539.

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

Online resources: [Contributor biographical information](#) | [Publisher description](#) | [Sample text](#)

Solution?

[Home](#) > [MARC view: His Excellency :](#)

[Normal view](#)

[MARC view](#)

[ISBD view](#)

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 06012>1619rj,aa b 001 0beng d
control field

010 ## - LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CONTROL NUMBER

LC control number 2006272139

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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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