LGBTQ+ Identities, Language, and the Library Catalog

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Cataloging Norms Interest Group
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On Overlap and Otherness: A Comparison of Three Vocabularies’ Approaches to LGBTQ+ Identity

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Abstract

Bibliographic records can include information from controlled vocabularies to capture identities about individuals, especially about authors or intended audiences; personal name authority records can also contain information about identity. Employing a systematic analysis of the overlap of the Homosaurus, Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), and Library of Congress Demographic Group Terms (LCDGT), this article explores the extent to which LGBTQ+ identities are represented in the three vocabularies. Despite LCSH’s long, iterative history of development and the faceted, post-coordinate nature of LCDGT, neither vocabulary was found to be adequate in covering the complex, LGBTQ+ identities represented in the Homosaurus.

What We Will Cover

• Background - identity and the library catalog
• Description of study
• Findings
• Discussion
• Further thoughts and projects
Identity and the catalog

Including identity metadata in the library catalog can help users more easily locate resources related to specific groups.

Accurately and sensitively capturing the identities of individuals or groups of people using controlled vocabularies can be fraught with difficulty, leading catalogers to assign subject terminology that may be harmful, offensive, and/or incorrect.
Vocabularies studied

- Library of Congress Demographic Group Terms (LCDGT)
- Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)
- The Homosaurus
Research Questions

➢ To what extent does terminology in the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and Library of Congress Demographic Group Terms (LCDGT) align with identities as represented in the Homosaurus?

➢ What implications for access can be identified as a result?
The Homosaurus

- A controlled vocabulary designed to represent LGBTQ+ perspectives and serve as a companion to the universal controlled vocabularies already in use.

- Created in the Netherlands by IHLIA LGBT Heritage in 1997 to describe their collections.

- Later expanded into other LGBTQ+ archives, including the Digital Transgender Archive (DTA) in 2015.

https://homosaurus.org/
Example identity terms from the Homosaurus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homosaurus Term</th>
<th>Homosaurus Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bears</td>
<td>U.S. slang used to describe hairy and large or muscular gay men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bissu</td>
<td>Mentally and physically androgynous shamans in Bugis (Indonesia) culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersex authors</td>
<td>Creator of a written work who is known to be intersex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers of bisexual people</td>
<td>A person who assumes the role of mother to a bisexual person; use only for individuals who self-identify as mothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undocumented LGBTQ+ residents</td>
<td>LGBTQ+ people who do not have official documentation to remain legal residents of the countries in which they live</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Library of Congress Demographic Group Terms (LCDGT)

→ Developed in 2013 for use in personal name authority records

→ Faceted vocabulary for describing characteristics of persons and groups

→ Generally terms represent single characteristics/ideas (e.g., Transgender people; Christians - not Transgender Christians)

Gender minorities
UF GLBT people
GLBTQ people
LGBT people
LGBTQ people

Transgender people
People who identify as transgender.
UF TG people
Trans-identified people
Trans people
Transgender-identified people
Transgendered people
Transgenders
Transpeople
Methodology

→ Comparative content analysis approach, focusing specifically on LGBTQ+ identity related terms within the Homosaurus, LCSH, and LCDGT.

→ Found all LGBTQ+ identity terms in the Homosaurus v. 3 (618 terms).

→ Searched LCSH and LCDGT for matching (or close matching) terms, and noted the match, or lack of match, in an Excel spreadsheet.
Example matches between the Homosaurus and LCSH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Match Type</th>
<th>Example: Homosaurus</th>
<th>Example Match: LCSH</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exact match</td>
<td>Male impersonators</td>
<td>Male impersonators</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closest match</td>
<td>LGBTQ+ Jews</td>
<td>Jewish sexual minorities</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No match</td>
<td>Intersex authors</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example matches between the Homosaurus and LCDGT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Match Type</th>
<th>Example: Homosaurus</th>
<th>Example Match: LCDGT</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exact match</td>
<td>Transgender people</td>
<td>Transgender people</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closest match</td>
<td>Wimmin</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faceted match</td>
<td>Bisexual victims of sexual abuse</td>
<td>Bisexuals ; Sexual abuse victims</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No match</td>
<td>Queer pagans</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Neither of the Library of Congress (LC) vocabularies exhibited a large overlap with the Homosaurus, with LCSH able to cover about 25% of terms and LCDGT covering roughly 28%.

Developed by members of the LGBTQ+ community, the Homosaurus features a greater reliance on cultural and community warrant, providing conceptual coverage of the domain of LGBTQ+ identities to a level that LC vocabularies are unable to match.
Discussion (Additional Considerations)

➢ LCSH includes LGBTQ+ identity terms that Homosaurus does not have, perhaps due to literary warrant (e.g., Lesbian athletes).

➢ The Homosaurus is a pre-coordinate system, and as such exhibits some of the same limitations as LCSH; most notably, preferred, pre-coordinated strings must by default privilege certain aspects of identity over others (e.g., “LGBTQ+ Jews” and not “Jewish LGBTQ+ Persons”).
In cataloging, we have a few assumptions

We know that LCSH and other controlled vocabularies are imperfect representations of concepts.

We also assume that if we build a perfect controlled vocabulary for a specific user group, that will address social justice concerns and allow for better access for users of that group.
Our current work
One overarching theme affecting access

• Terminology to describe identity is fraught, even for members of the group. For example, one participant expressed concern about the neutrality of the term ‘queer.’
  
  • P9: ‘…I know a lot of older LGBTQ people aren’t comfortable with that since it’s a reclaimed slur so I, like, I would personally want to lean towards something more neutral.’
Another overarching theme

• In one study, participants had two separate subject vocabularies but still would not able to search effectively, despite acknowledging the need to use different terminology when carrying out a subject search.
Conclusion

Much more work needs to be done to understand how users interact with library catalogs

- What is the best use of cataloger time when it comes to subject vocabularies in catalogs?

- How should information intermediaries like catalogers envision their role in terms of the ethical provision of access to information?
Questions?

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