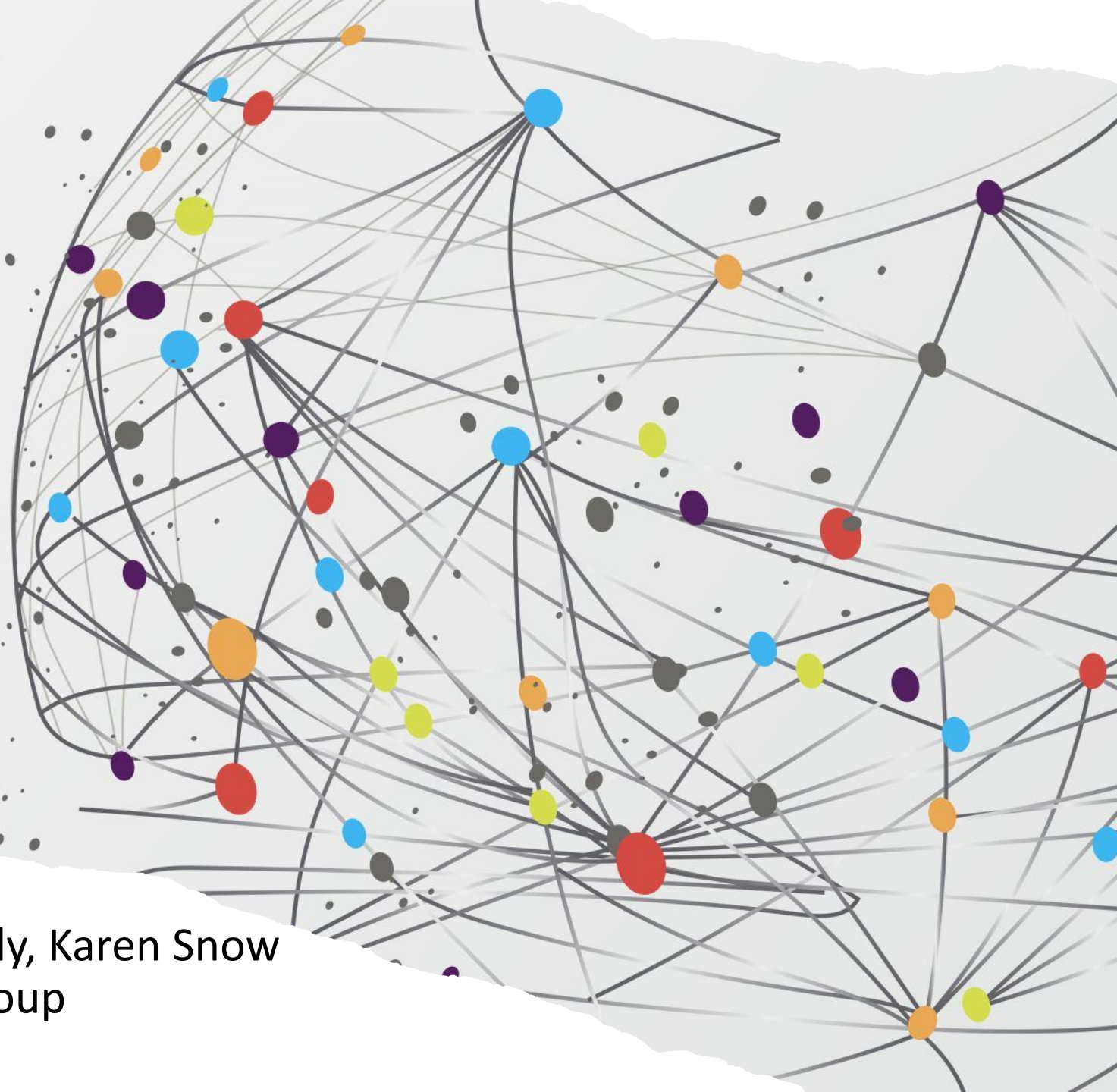# LGBTQ+ Identities, Language, and the Library Catalog

Brian Dobreski, Heather Moulaison-Sandy, Karen Snow
Cataloging Norms Interest Group
March 10, 2023

Submit an article   Journal homepage

Enter keywords, authors, D

≡ ◄) Listen ►

Articles

On Overlap and Otherness: A Comparison of Three Vocabularies' Approaches to LGBTQ+ Identity

Brian Dobreski (iD), Karen Snow (iD) & Heather Moulaison-Sandy ✉ (iD)

66 Download citation   ☑ https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2022.2090040   Check for updates

📄 Full Article   🖼 Figures & data   **66** Citations   📊 Metrics   🖨 Reprints & Permissions   📄 View PDF   ◈ View EPUB

In this article

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.

Pre-print version (freely available): https://bit.ly/41nEbOL

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)
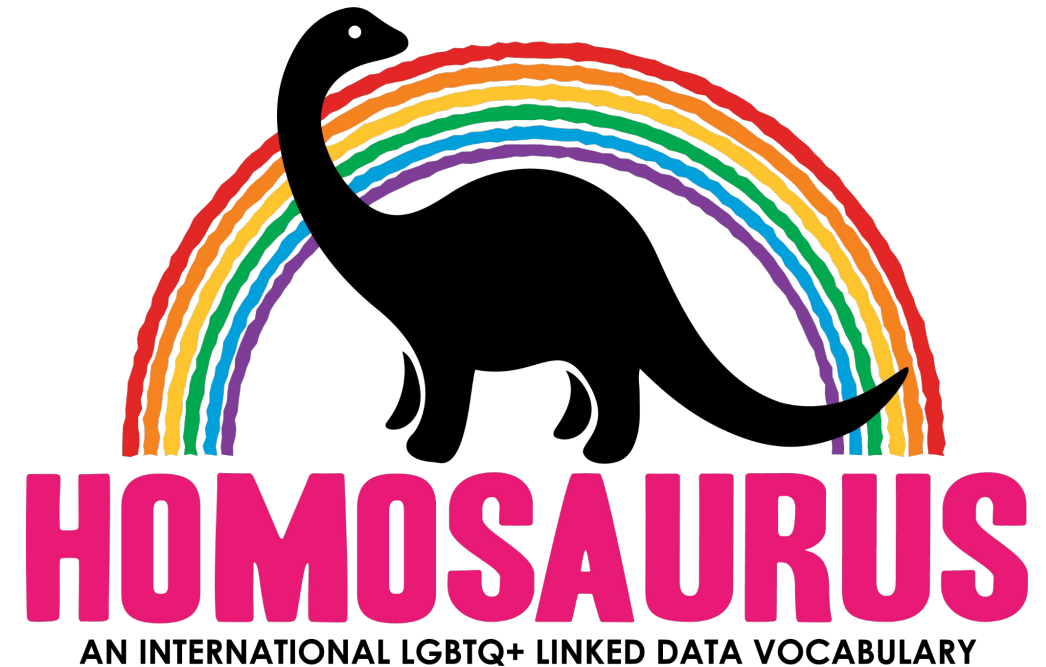
Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)

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.

HOMOSAURUS
AN INTERNATIONAL LGBTQ+ LINKED DATA VOCABULARY

https://homosaurus.org/

Example identity terms from the Homosaurus

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

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.

Homosaurus prefLabel	Identity?	LCSH?	LCDGT?
Acault	x	Not in LCSH	Not in LCDGT
Adoptive parents	x	Adoptive parents	Adoptive parents
Adult Children of Alcoholics	x	Adult children of alcoholics	Not in LCDGT
Agender people	x	Not in LCSH	Not in LCDGT
Agi	x	Not in LCSH	Not in LCDGT
AIDS activists	x	AIDS activists	Not in LCDGT
Akava'ine	x	Not in LCSH	Not in LCDGT
Alcoholics	x	Alcoholics	Alcoholics
Ali	x	Not in LCSH	Not in LCDGT
Allies	x	Not in LCSH	Not in LCDGT
Alyha	x	Not in LCSH	Not in LCDGT
Anchor partners	x	Not in LCSH	Not in 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

Match Type	Example: Homosaurus	Example Match: LCSH	Count	Percentage
Exact match	Male impersonators	Male impersonators	56	9%
Closest match	LGBTQ+ Jews	Jewish sexual minorities	97	16%
No match	Intersex authors	n/a	465	75%

Example matches between the Homosaurus and LCDGT

Match Type	Example: Homosaurus	Example Match: LCDGT	Count	Percentage
Exact match	Transgender people	Transgender people	23	4%
Closest match	Wimmin	Women	11	2%
Faceted match	Bisexual victims of sexual abuse	Bisexuals ; Sexual abuse victims	142	23%
No match	Queer pagans	n/a	442	72%

Discussion (The 'Not Surprising' Stuff)

➢ 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").

Hierarchy Display:

LGBTQ+ people in ethnic groups
LGBTQ+ religious people
 Jewish LGBTQ+ people
  Jewish bisexual people
  Jewish gay men
  Jewish lesbians
  Jewish queer people
  Jewish transgender people

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

This Photo by Unknown author is licensed under CC BY-SA-NC.

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?

Karen Snow

- Professor
- School of Information Studies
- Dominican University
- ksnow@dom.edu

Brian Dobreski

- Assistant Professor
- School of Information Sciences
- University of Tennessee-Knoxville
- bdobresk@utk.edu

Heather Moulaison-Sandy

- Associate Professor, Director of Graduate Studies
- iSchool at the University of Missouri
- moulaisonhe@missouri.edu