Perspective

Engaging an Author in a Critical Reading of Subject Headings

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ABSTRACT

Most practitioners of critical librarianship agree that subject description is both valuable and political. Subject headings can either reinforce or subvert hierarchies of social domination. Outside the library profession, however, even among stakeholders such as authors, there is little awareness that librarians think or care about the politics of subject description. Talking about subject description with the authors whose works we hold and represent can strengthen our relationships, demystify our work, and hold us accountable for our practices. This paper discusses an interview I conducted with author Eli Clare about the Library of Congress Subject Headings assigned to his book, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*. Clare describes feeling dismayed by and detached from the subject headings assigned to his book. He offers a sophisticated analysis of individual headings. He also reflects on the subject description project itself, using theories from genderqueer and transgender activism to discuss the limitations of categorization.

INTRODUCTION

Most practitioners of critical librarianship agree that subject description is both valuable and political. Outside the library profession, however, even among stakeholders such as authors, there is little awareness that librarians think or care about the politics of subject description. Talking about subject description with the authors whose works we hold and represent can strengthen our relationships, demystify our work, and hold us accountable for our practices. This paper discusses an interview I conducted in 2011 with author and activist Eli Clare about the Library of Congress Subject Headings assigned to his book, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation.*[1] The book, published in 1999 and reissued in 2009, is a collection of essays covering a broad range of topics, including sexuality, disability, class, and the environment. The three subject headings, assigned during the Cataloging in Publication process, are: "Clare, Eli," "Women political activists—United States—Biography," and "Cerebral palsied—United States—Biography."

Three themes emerged from my interview with Clare. First, librarians can launch important conversations by inviting authors to engage with subject headings. Second, the headings assigned to *Exile and Pride* do not accurately represent the subjects and theoretical perspectives of the book. Finally, concepts from transgender and genderqueer activism are helpful in understanding and addressing the inherent limitations of subject description.

READINGS SUBJECT HEADINGS CRITICALLY

Subject headings are standardized terms that help users find items by subject in library catalogs. Although direct subject searching is less common than it was in the era of analog card catalogs,[2] subject headings continue to play a key role in information access. Subject headings contribute to the success of keyword searches [3] and lead users to sources that would otherwise remain hidden.[4]

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[1] Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness and Liberation*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2009).

[2] Ray R. Larson, "The Decline of Subject Searching: Long-Term Trends and Patterns of Index Use in an Online Catalog," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 42, no. 3 (April 1991): 197–215.

[3] Tina Gross, Arlene Taylor, and Daniel Joudrey, "Still a Lot to Lose: The Role of Controlled Vocabulary in Keyword Searching," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (January 2015): 1–39.

[4] Sheila Bair and Sharon Carlson, "Where Keywords Fail: Using Metadata to Facilitate Digital Humanities Scholarship," *Journal of Library Metadata* 8, no. 3 (October 2008): 249–62, doi:10.1080/19386380802398503; Jeffrey Garrett, "Subject Headings in Full-Text

By asking Clare to comment on the subject headings assigned to his book, I was implicitly encouraging him to read them critically. What I mean by "reading subject headings critically" is analyzing and interpreting them carefully in a larger context, especially in relation to structures of social power. Perhaps the best-known critical reader of subject headings is Sanford Berman, whose work beginning in the early 1970s identified subject headings with racist, sexist, and imperialist implications. Berman's work helped launch a wave of interest in the language of subject headings.[5] Berman was not, however, the first writer to address deficiencies in subject headings' treatment of marginalized groups – for example, Frances Yocom addressed a lack of subject headings for materials about African-Americans in 1940.[6]

Most critical readings of subject headings focus on the Library of Congress Subject Headings. The Library of Congress subject heading list is the main controlled vocabulary used in library catalogs in the United States.[7] It is also used extensively in other countries, either directly or as a basis for local controlled vocabularies. Although the Library of Congress's original mandate was to describe books for use by Congress, it has become a *de facto* national library. In addition to maintaining the list of Library of Congress Subject Headings, the Library of Congress creates catalog records for individual works. These records are distributed electronically and copied by many US libraries for use in their own catalogs. Although each individual library is free to modify the headings or add new ones, most libraries copy headings directly for the sake of efficiency and consistency. Programs such as the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) have redistributed some of the responsibility for original cataloging. A 2008 report states, "Although it will undoubtedly remain a major producer of cataloging copy, [the Library of Congress] can and should begin to see itself as one of many peer institutions that can contribute bibliographic data to the community."[8] The Library of Congress continuously

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Environments: The ECCO Experiment," *College & Research Libraries* 68, no. 1 (January 2007): 69–80.

[5] Monika Kirtland and Pauline Cochrane, "Critical Views of LCSH - the Library of Congress Subject Headings: A Bibliographic and Bibliometric Essay," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 1, no. 2–3 (1982): 71–94, doi:10.1300/J104v01n02_04.

[6] Frances Lydia Yocom, *A List of Subject Headings for Books by and about the Negro* (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1940), http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015030783313.

[7] Lois Mai Chan and Theodora Hodges, "Entering the Millennium: A New Century for LCSH," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 29, no. 1–2 (2000): 225–34, doi:10.1300/J104v29n01_16.

[8] Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control, "On the Record: Report of the Library of Congress Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control" (Library of Congress, January 9, 2008), 12.

updates its list of headings to keep up with changing terminology as reflected in printed books.[9] As Melissa Adler points out, the Library of Congress is a federal institution, and its perspective mirrors that of the United States government.[10]

The Library of Congress Subject Headings have been critiqued for being inconsistent, slow to change, and inadequate in representing certain topics.[11] The critiques I focus on here are those concerned with the social and political implications of the language of headings. In the 1970s through 1990s, writers like Doris Clack,[12] Joan Marshall,[13] Mary Ellen Capek,[14] Emmett and Catherine Davis,[15] and Hope Olson[16] identified problems and proposed solutions regarding subject headings' treatment of race, gender, and disability. In recent years, several writers have furthered the project of reading subject headings critically, including Melissa Adler,[17] Emily Drabinski,[18] Jenna Freedman,[19] Matt Johnson,[20] and K. R. Roberto.[21]

Many scholars of knowledge organization now agree that categorization and subject description cannot be neutral. Writers and librarians have proposed and carried

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[9] Chan and Hodges, "Entering the Millennium."

[10] Melissa Adler, "Broker of Information, the 'Nation's Most Important Commodity': The Library of Congress in the Neoliberal Era," *Information & Culture: A Journal of History* 50, no. 1 (2015): 24–50, doi:10.1353/lac.2015.0002.

[11] Karen S. Fischer, "Critical Views of LCSH, 1990–2001: The Third Bibliographic Essay," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2005): 63–109, doi:10.1300/J104v41n01_05.

[12] Doris H Clack, *Black Literature Resources: Analysis and Organization* (New York: M. Dekker, 1975).

[13] Joan K Marshall, *On Equal Terms: A Thesaurus for Nonsexist Indexing and Cataloging* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 1977).

[14] Mary Ellen S Capek, National Council for Research on Women (U.S.), and Business and Professional Women's Foundation, *A Women's Thesaurus: An Index of Language Used to Describe and Locate Information by and about Women* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

[15] Emmett A Davis and Catherine M Davis, *Mainstreaming Library Service for Disabled People* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1980).

[16] Hope A. Olson, *The Power to Name: Locating the Limits of Subject Representation in Libraries* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic, 2002).

[17] Melissa Adler, "PARAPHILIAS: The Perversion of Meaning in the Library of Congress Subject Headings," *Advances in Classification Research Online* 22, no. 1 (2011): 1–20.

[18] Emily Drabinski, "Teaching the Radical Catalog," in *Radical Cataloging: Essays at the Front*, ed. K. R. Roberto (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 198–205.

[19] Jenna Freedman, "The Library of Congress Does Not Admit Police Brutality Victims but Does Acknowledge Rape in the Military," Lower East Side Librarian, January 3, 2015, http://lowereastsidelibrarian.info/lcshsaco/2014/october.

[20] Matt Johnson, "Transgender Subject Access: History and Current Practice," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 48, no. 8 (2010): 661–83, doi:10.1080/01639370903534398.

[21] K. R. Roberto, "Inflexible Bodies," *Journal of Information Ethics* 20, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 56–64, doi:10.3172/JIE.20.2.56.

out a number of strategies for addressing the problem of injustice in catalogs. Some of these strategies are campaigning for changes to headings,[22] teaching library users to interact critically with catalogs,[23] supplementing headings with user tagging,[24] and explicitly articulating the perspectives of information systems.[25] Socially conscious librarians need not choose among these options – we can embrace many of them at once. Inviting authors to engage critically with subject headings is another strategy for confronting bias. When we invite authors to consider the fact that subject headings are political structures, we acknowledge that representing all information perfectly is impossible. Although representation will never be perfect, it is imperative that librarians work toward making our systems more just. As Angell and Roberto state, "The United States Library of Congress (LC) plays a pivotal role in naming and categorizing the information that informs and describes human life both within the country and internationally. Because of the power imbued in this responsibility, the language used must accurately reflect the people whose identities are at stake."[26]

Most critical readings of subject headings focus on the terms themselves, not on how they are applied to particular works. This paper's reading of the headings for *Exile and Pride* follows the example set by Hope Olson in her monograph *The Power to Name*.[27] She analyzed the headings for several books by and about women who represented "a multiple *Other*,"[28] including works by bell hooks, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, and Adrienne Rich. Like Olson, I am interested in studying how subject headings from a controlled vocabulary are applied to books that deal with complex identities. *Exile and Pride* foregrounds the perspective of "a multiple *Other*," since Clare writes about his and others' experiences being Othered on the basis of disability, sexuality, class, gender, and intersections of these identities.

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[22] Freedman, "The Library of Congress Does Not Admit Police Brutality Victims but Does Acknowledge Rape in the Military."

[23] Ellen Broidy, "Gender and the Politics of Information: Reflections on Bringing the Library into the Classroom," *Library Trends* 56, no. 2 (2008): 494–508; Emily Drabinski, "Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction," *Library Quarterly* 83, no. 2 (April 2013): 94–111.

[24] Melissa Adler, "Transcending Library Catalogs: A Comparative Study of Controlled Terms in Library of Congress Subject Headings and User-Generated Tags in LibraryThing for Transgender Books," *Journal of Web Librarianship* 3, no. 4 (2009): 309–31, doi:10.1080/19322900903341099.

[25] Melanie Feinberg, "Hidden Bias to Responsible Bias: An Approach to Information Systems Based on Haraway's Situated Knowledges," *Information Research* 12, no. 4 (2007): paper colis07.

[26] Katelyn Angell and K. R. Roberto, "Cataloging," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (May 1, 2014): 53, doi:10.1215/23289252-2399587.

[27] Olson, *The Power to Name*.

[28] Ibid., 184.

ELI CLARE AND EXILE AND PRIDE

I interviewed Eli Clare by phone in 2011. I first met Clare at a university lecture he delivered. Before his visit, I looked up his book in the library catalog and noticed the subject headings, which struck me as being incongruous with the text. After his lecture, I asked whether he would be interested in discussing the subject headings, and he agreed. I emailed him some questions and we spoke by phone a few weeks later. I recorded and transcribed the interview.

Clare is an accomplished writer, speaker, and activist. His work emphasizes the need for connection and communication among diverse social justice movements. On his website, he identifies himself as white, disabled, and genderqueer. The book whose subject headings I asked him about, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation,* was his first published book. It is a collection of essays that cover a broad range of topics, including race, class, sexuality, disability, and the environment. The essays take the form of personal narrative mixed with cultural criticism and theory. *Exile and Pride* was first published in 1999 by South End Press, which was a nonprofit, collectively-run publishing house for 37 years before it closed in 2014.[29] In 2009, South End published a second edition of the book as part of their South End Press Classics series.

In the OCLC WorldCat database, the catalog record for *Exile and Pride* contains three Library of Congress Subject Headings. They were assigned during the Cataloging in Publication process and appear in the front matter of the book. They are duplicated in the catalogs of many individual libraries. In searching the online catalogs of several libraries, I did not find any that had supplemented or replaced the headings listed in WorldCat with local headings. The three subject headings are:

> Clare, Eli
> Women political activists—United States—Biography
> Cerebral palsied—United States—Biography

In discussing my interview with Clare, I will focus on three themes: first, why it is worthwhile to invite authors to engage with subject headings; second, the specific inadequacies in the headings from Clare's perspective; and third, how he uses concepts from genderqueer activist work to inform his analysis.

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[29] Judith Rosen, "South End Throws in the Towel," *PublishersWeekly.com*, July 24, 2014, http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/bookselling/article/63443-south-end-throws-in-the-towel.html.

INVITING AUTHORS TO ENGAGE WITH SUBJECT DESCRIPTION

Librarians can launch important conversations by inviting authors to engage with subject headings. Although Clare is an accomplished cultural critic, the Library of Congress Subject Headings did not invite his critical eye until I asked about them. Clare described his initial reaction to the subject headings this way: "What I...remember is opening the book…and noticing the subject headings and thinking, 'What in the world is this? Have they really read the book?' And moving on from there." To Clare, the subject headings were slightly baffling, but not worth dwelling on. Clare further described his sense of detachment from the subject headings: "I either wasn't paying attention during copy editing, or I did pay attention but felt that this was a realm that I had no authority over."

Clare was not consulted about the assignment of subject headings, although he was involved with other aspects of the book's publication, such as the choice of cover art. For him, the process by which books are assigned subject headings was obscure and disconnected from his authorship. He said my interview questions, which I had emailed in advance, prompted him to verbalize his critiques of the headings for the first time: "Rather than being like, oh yeah, I saw them, they don't make sense, whatever...your asking the questions made me think...I can have an opinion about this."

Even though Clare is a skilled cultural critic—in *Exile and Pride*, he offers critical analyses of a public service advertisement, an environmental group's newsletter, and historical accounts of freak shows—the Library of Congress Subject Headings did not invite his critical eye until I asked about them. Something about subject headings makes them uninviting to dialog. There is no easy way for non-librarians to perceive the context, structure, and history of subject headings. As Drabinski has argued, however, subject headings can be a fruitful ground for critical engagement.[30] The field of information studies would be enriched if activists, scholars, and students from other disciplines analyzed and critiqued subject headings the way they critique other cultural artifacts, such as films and advertisements.

Very little has been written about authors' perceptions of catalog records. Some authors undoubtedly discuss subject headings or other elements of catalog records with friends and colleagues, but these conversations usually happen informally and are not recorded in the literature. In one article, Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto[31] write about a time a cataloger had the rare experience of getting feedback from an author during the cataloging process. The author "was fascinated with the various codes and nuanced

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[30] Drabinski, "Queering the Catalog."

[31] Amber Billey, Emily Drabinski, and K. R. Roberto, "What's Gender Got to Do with It? A Critique of RDA 9.7," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (May 19, 2014): 412–21, doi:10.1080/01639374.2014.882465.

rules we follow to create our MARC records,"[32] but found one element objectionable. In this case, the author did not critique a subject heading in a bibliographic record, but rather a gender field in a name authority record. The author saw it as unnecessary and undesirable to label the name authority record by gender. Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto used this experience to support their argument against requiring gender as an element of name authority files.

When authors are consulted about subject description, it is usually in the context of author-supplied keywords. Several studies have found that author-supplied keywords complement subject headings to enhance findability.[33] C. Rockelle Strader found that author-supplied keywords for theses and dissertations often used up-to-date terms that were not yet part of controlled vocabularies.[34] Author-supplied keywords are used more often for articles than for books. Based on the website of the Cataloging in Publication Program, it appears that when the Library of Congress collects books and preprints from publishers to be cataloged, they do not ask for author-supplied keywords.

Some may argue that the opinion of an author is not relevant to the assignment of subject terms. Hjørland states that a book might have many possible subjects: the author's version, the reader's version, the publisher's version, and the librarian's version.[35] These subjects frequently differ, and the author does not hold a privileged position in identifying the subject of his or her work. Engaging with authors does not mean giving them authority over subject description. Rather, it means launching authentic conversations that strengthen the connection between authors and librarians. Catalogers can learn from authors about new terminology in emerging fields, while authors can learn from catalogers about the purpose and significance of subject description. As the book publishing industry changes, it is important for authors, librarians, publishers, and bookstores to build alliances and demystify each other's work.

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[32] Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto, "What's Gender Got to Do with It?," 413.

[33] Theda Schwing, Sevim McCutcheon, and Margaret Beecher Maurer, "Uniqueness Matters: Author-Supplied Keywords and LCSH in the Library Catalog," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 50, no. 8 (2012): 903–28, doi:10.1080/01639374.2012.703164; Margaret Beecher Maurer, Sevim McCutcheon, and Theda Schwing, "Who's Doing What? Findability and Author-Supplied ETD Metadata in the Library Catalog," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (May 1, 2011): 277–310, doi:10.1080/01639374.2011.573440; C. Rockelle Strader, "Author-Assigned Keywords versus Library of Congress Subject Headings," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 53, no. 4 (October 2009): 243–50.

[34] Strader, "Author-Assigned Keywords versus Library of Congress Subject Headings."

[35] Birger Hjørland, "The Concept of 'Subject' in Information Science," *Journal of Documentation* 42, no. 2 (1992): 172–200.

INADEQUACIES OF HEADINGS

Although Clare had not previously considered the subject headings in detail, he offered a sophisticated analysis after I asked about them. Clare spoke about each of the subject headings in turn. The first heading is his name, since authors' names are included in subject headings for books with elements of memoir or autobiography. Clare did not find the first heading problematic. In his case, there is no discrepancy between his preferred name and the name assigned by catalogers. Catalogers' treatment of preferred and assigned names has changed over time. Olson, for example, discussed the heading 'Hooks, Bell' as applied to the book *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black,* which ignored the lowercase letters in bell hooks's chosen name.[36] The Library of Congress has since updated the heading to use lowercase letters: 'hooks, bell, 1952-.' Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto have written about catalogers' practice of recording dates associated with authors' name changes, noting that in the case of transgender authors who have left their former names behind, a cataloger's log of name and gender changes might be inappropriate.[37]

The second subject heading, 'Women political activists—United States—Biography,' seemed odd to me when I first saw it, because I have only known of Eli Clare as a man. When the book was first published in 1999, however, Clare identified as a woman. He had this to say about the second subject heading:

> The 'Women political activists' makes some sense—in 1999 when *Exile* was originally published, I had not yet transitioned, and so I was living in the world as a woman, and a lesbian, and as someone who was seen as a man on one street corner and a woman on the next street corner, living in a very gender ambiguous place. So there's a way in which 'Women political activists' as a heading in 1999 made some sense, although in 2011, because I now live in the world as a white guy, that heading makes much less sense. I'm not upset by having that piece of history connected to my work. It's a piece of history I feel really clearly about not wanting to abandon.

The fact that the heading 'Women political activists' now makes "makes much less sense" in describing Clare is just one striking example of a phenomenon that occurs frequently: as the world changes, subject headings stay the same, thereby becoming obsolete.[38] Even when the Library of Congress changes subject headings, old headings remain attached to works in many library catalogs. This situation preserves a piece of

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[36] Olson, *The Power to Name*, 214.

[37] Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto, "What's Gender Got to Do with It?," 417.

[38] Michael K. Buckland, "Obsolescence in Subject Description," *Journal of Documentation* 68, no. 2 (2012): 154–61.

history, but the presence of obsolete headings alongside current ones can also impede access to information, as in a situation Olson describes: "If a searcher finds, as I did, 113 records in the [Library of Congress] catalogue under 'Afro-American women,' what would make them suspect that there are more and newer records under 'African American women'?"[39]

Although Clare did not reject the 'Women political activists' heading, he did critique it:

> The last essay in the book is, in part, about exploring the connections between gender and disability… in part through personal story of my gender location as someone who's never felt like a woman and never felt like a man. So there are ways in which assigning the heading 'Women political activists' … was a little bit of a sense of, "Have you read the book?" You know, rather than 'Political activists.' Like, "Have you read the book about what I'm saying about the gender binary?" Even at that point in my life.

The answer to the question, "Have you read the book?" might well be, 'No.' Catalogers do not usually read books in their entirety when assigning subjects. Instead, they might skim sections of the book and examine the title, chapter titles, and publisher's summary. A cataloging textbook by Lois Mai Chan[40] gives these instructions about determining a book's subject matter:

> The most reliable and certain way to determine the subject content is to read or examine the work in detail. Since this is not always practical for reasons of cost, catalogers usually have to use other means. Titles are sometimes but not always a fair indication of content....Other features of the work often provide information relating to content. These include abstracts if any, tables of contents, chapter headings, prefaces, introductions, indexes, book jackets, slipcases, and any other accompanying descriptive material...[41]

Clare's question "Have you read the book?" is not simply about cataloging practice. The subtext of the question is, 'Do you understand my perspective?' The book's subtitle is "Disability, queerness, and liberation." The catalogers must have read that subtitle as part of their subject assessment, even if time did not permit reading the entire book. Based on the subtitle, it seems clear that Clare's queerness is more central to the book than his gender, but there is no mention of queerness in the subject headings. As Clare

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[39] Olson, *The Power to Name*, 189.

[40] Lois Mai Chan, *Cataloging and Classification: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007).

[41] Ibid., 208–209.

points out, calling someone a "Woman political activist" rather than a "Political activist" emphasizes a binary understanding of gender and implies that a person's gender is her most salient feature.

The third subject heading is "Cerebral palsied—United States—Biography." To Clare, this heading was the most problematic. He explained:

> There's no secret that I have cerebral palsy. I write about having CP, I talk about having CP, there are a number of stories about living with CP that are very important in *Exile and Pride*. But all the stories are used in service to creating a broad-based, cross-disability politics and contributing to disability culture. So that I would say that the book in general isn't about cerebral palsy, but the book in general is about disability. Disability history, disability culture, disability politics. And to have that sense of the book about disability being reduced or compressed into what is a medical diagnosis, something the doctors have said about my body — and cerebral palsy isn't the only thing the doctors have said about my body — to have all that politics and culture and history reduced to cerebral palsy was like a big, "What have you done and why have you done it?"

Conceptualizing disability as a common identity is an important step for collective political action. By assigning a subject heading related to Clare's individual medical diagnosis rather than one related to the broader concept of disability, catalogers at the Library of Congress inadvertently separate Clare's work from the work of other people in the disability rights movement. They prevent a searcher from using a single subject heading to gather material about disability as identity.

The concept of disability as a collective political identity is central to the disability rights movement and the disability studies field. The social movement for disability rights emerged following World War II, and the academic field of disability studies emerged in the 1980s. Disability activists and scholars critique dichotomous understandings of "abnormal / normal" and "sick / well," refusing to see people with disabilities as deficient, flawed, or worthy of pity. While not denying that some impairments cause physical pain and inconvenience, disability activists point out that many of the barriers and challenges they face are caused by a disabling environment. The presence or absence of stigma and discrimination, and the accessibility of the built environment, varies enormously with context and shapes the experience of disability. Like feminist theorists, critical race theorists, and queer theorists, disability theorists identify and dismantle the way that Western culture presents straight, white, able-bodied male bodies as normal and other bodies as deviant. Clare's desire to be identified as disabled rather than "cerebral palsied" reflects his theoretical understanding of disability as a social category. As theorist Simi Linton describes:

When medical definitions of *disability* are dominant, it is logical to separate people according to biomedical condition through the use of diagnostic categories and to forefront medical perspectives on human variation. When disability is rendered as a social/political category, people with a variety of conditions are identified as *people with disabilities* or *disabled people*, a group bound by common social and political experience.[42]

The language associated with disability is politically charged and constantly evolving. As people with disabilities have gained rights, archaic terms like "invalid" and "retarded" have become offensive. A few derogatory terms, like "crip" (from "cripple")[43] and "gimp," have been reclaimed by some people with disabilities and used for self-identification and solidarity. Some common phrases, like "wheelchair-bound" and "afflicted with cerebral palsy," are disempowering and gratuitously negative.[44] Many writers advocate person-first language, which asks the speaker to foreground the person rather than the disability. Person-first language refers to "people with disabilities" rather than "disabled people." The American Psychological Association is one of many organizations that promotes person-first language.[45] Person-first language is not universally embraced, however. Some writers are comfortable with disability-first language and argue that, in fact, "disabled people" better reflects their theoretical perspective.[46] The Autistic Self-Advocacy Network argues for the use of 'autistic person' instead of "person with autism,"[47] and the term "disabled person" is preferred in the United Kingdom.[48] The debate over person-first and identify-first language illustrates the fact that linguistic choices have complex and nuanced relationships to identity among people with disabilities.

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[42] Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 12.

[43] Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1189107.

[44] Committee on Disability Issues in Psychology, "Guidelines for Non-Handicapping Language in APA Journals" (American Psychological Association, 1992), http://www.apastyle.org/disabilities.html.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Cara Liebowitz, "I Am Disabled: On Identity-First Versus People-First Language," *The Body Is Not an Apology*, March 20, 2015, http://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/i-am-disabled-on-identity-first-versus-people-first-language/.

[47] Lydia Brown, "Identity-First Language," *Autistic Self Advocacy Network*, 2011, http://autisticadvocacy.org/home/about-asan/identity-first-language/.

[48] Gary L Albrecht, Katherine D Seelman, and Michael Bury, "Introduction: The Formation of Disability Studies," in *Handbook of Disability Studies* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2001), 1–8.

The catalogers who assigned the subject heading "Cerebral palsied" were probably unaware that it might be interpreted in the way Clare interpreted it. Perhaps their decision would not change if they were aware; as Buckland writes, "Since each community has at least slightly different linguistic practices, no one index will be ideal for everyone and, perhaps, not for anyone.[49] Catalogers likely chose the heading "Cerebral palsied" because it was more specific than "People with disabilities." Catalogers make difficult choices about how to represent books. Their choices would be better informed, however, if they consulted with experts in the relevant fields. Chan's cataloging textbook states, "Occasionally, subject specialists may have to be consulted, particularly when the subject matter is unfamiliar to the cataloger or indexer."[50] The professional literature of librarianship has only recently begun to engage with disability studies and the disability rights movement.[51] Clare noted that South End Press, which he called "a small, really valuable lefty political press," had not published any other books with explicit disability themes. In discussions with them, he said, "I really felt their lack of experience with disability politics." It is likely, then, that neither the publisher who printed the subject headings on the book's copyright page nor the Library of Congress catalogers realized the political implications of the subject heading "Cerebral palsied."

Clare also mentioned a second reason that the subject heading "Cerebral palsied" is problematic. In addition to isolating cerebral palsy from a broader disability identity, it uses an unusual form of the term. Clare said, "And then to have cerebral palsy turned into an adjective, which I rarely, rarely encounter anywhere, is just a puzzle. In terms of the subject headings as a way of searching, who is going to search under, not cerebral palsy, but cerebral palsied?"

Many people have charged that Library of Congress Subject Headings use esoteric terms. Berman objected to "The concealment of material on current and even vital topics by subject-cataloging it under remote or improbable rubrics."[52] To demonstrate an obscurely-worded heading, Berman would hold up light bulbs during presentations, telling the audience that according to the Library of Congress, they were "Electric lamps, Incandescent."[53] In Rothbauer's study of self-identified lesbian and queer young women, she found that participants conducted keyword searches for the terms "lesbian" or "gay," but not "homosexual," which was a term used in many subject

[49] Buckland, "Obsolescence in Subject Description," 159.

[50] Chan, *Cataloging and Classification*, 209.

[51] Alana Kumbier and Julia Starkey, "Access Is Not Problem Solving: Disability Justice and Libraries," *Library Trends* 64, no. 3 (Winter 2016): 468–91.

[52] Sanford Berman, *The Joy of Cataloging: Essays, Letters, Reviews, and Other Explosions* (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1981), 4.

[53] Sanford Berman, *Not in My Library!: "Berman's Bag" Columns from The Unabashed Librarian, 2000-2013* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013), 105.

headings.[54] Similarly, a user looking for books about cerebral palsy would not be likely to search "Cerebral palsied."

Two of the three subject headings end with the subdivision "—Biography." This heading seemed strange to Clare, who argued that *Exile and Pride* was a collection of essays, not a biography or an autobiography. He said:

> There's clearly big pieces of autobiography or memoir in the book, but the book is such a mix of memoir with political theory and thinking, and analysis with some history, with some political diatribe or polemic, that it's puzzling to me why, not just these headings, but why a lot of readers...see the whole book as memoir.

Labeling Clare's essays as autobiography depoliticizes them. By focusing only on the autobiographical elements of the essays and ignoring their theoretical, political, and polemic character, the subject headings place *Exile and Pride* in the realm of the personal instead of the political.

A major concept in the book, missing from the headings, is the idea of queerness. Queer people resist the dominant paradigm of sexuality as only male-female attraction. They might be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or asexual. The term "queer" was originally a slur, but many people have since embraced and reclaimed it as a term to mark identity and community. The concept of queerness can be applied not only to sexuality, but also to gender identity. A growing number of people identify as genderqueer. Genderqueer people resist the dominant paradigm of gender as only a male-female binary. They do not identify as strictly male or strictly female. There is a lack of published information by and about genderqueer people, but Brett Genny Beemyn predicts that more will be written in the near future as awareness of genderqueer identity grows.[55] Clare identifies as both queer and genderqueer. Although queerness is one of the main topics of the book and mentioned in the subtitle, it is not reflected in the subject headings. None of the subject headings relates to sexuality, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

Clare did not spend much time discussing the lack of a heading for queerness. However, cataloger James Weinheimer commented on this omission in a discussion on the AutoCat listserv, after he heard about my work at a library conference. Weinheimer wrote that while most of the subject headings were understandable in the context of

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[54] Paulette Rothbauer, "'People Aren't Afraid Anymore, but It's Hard to Find Books': Reading Practices That Inform the Personal and Social Identities of Self-Identified Lesbian and Queer Young Women," *Canadian Journal of Information & Library Sciences* 28, no. 3 (September 2004): 53–74.

[55] Brett Genny Beemyn, "Genderqueer," in *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society*, ed. Jodi O'Brien, vol. 1 (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009), 370–71.

cataloging guidelines, the omission of queerness was not. Weinheimer hypothesized that the cataloger chose not to represent queerness because of his or her unfamiliarity with the concept. He wrote, "I can imagine a cataloger thinking: This is too difficult so instead of making a terrible mistake, I prefer to ignore it."[56]

Clare mentioned that other significant aspects of *Exile and Pride*, including its focus on environmental issues and on class, are left out of the subject headings. These aspects of the book, he said, are also frequently omitted when bookstores classify *Exile and Pride* and when professors teach it in classes. Further, he remembered South End Press having difficulty deciding how to market the book and what categories to list in the corner of the back cover. Clare said, "So it's not just the subject headings that have trouble embracing how broad the book is."

In summary, the interview with Clare led to the following critiques of the subject headings:

"Clare, Eli"
- No problems

"Women political activists—United States—Biography"
- Assumes that gender is fixed, inadequately representing the fact that Clare's gender has changed over time
- Treats gender as one of the most salient features of identity, inadequately representing the fact that Clare does not identify strongly with either side of a gender binary
- Depoliticizes the book by labeling it as biography, inadequately representing the fact that it contains political criticism and theory

"Cerebral palsied—United States—Biography"
- Focuses on the medical diagnosis of cerebral palsy, inadequately representing the fact that the book focuses on cross-disability identity

Concepts missing from the headings:
- Queerness
- Class
- Environmental issues

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[56] James Weinheimer, "Re: [ACAT] Amelia Koford's Research on LC Subject Headings Which She Reported on at ACRL," *First Thus*, April 26, 2013, http://blog.jweinheimer.net/2013/04/re-acat-[AUTHOR'S]-research-on-lc_28.html.

GENDERQUEER ANALYSIS

Clare's critique of the subject headings was informed by a sophisticated understanding of the nature of representation and organization. In his career as a speaker and facilitator, he often discusses issues of language and representation. His CV, available on his website, lists titles of presentations and workshops such as "A Trail of Words and History: Naming Ourselves as Disabled and/or LGBT People," "Cure and Diagnosis: Slippery and Multiple Definitions," and "Narratives of Race, Disability, and Queerness: On Rage, Language, and Theory." Clare's work with genderqueer and transgender activism has influenced his conception of categorization. Brett Beemyn defines the terms genderqueer and transgender this way:

> First widely used in the late 1990s, genderqueer is an identity adopted by individuals who characterize themselves as neither male nor female, as both, or as somewhere in between. Although genderqueers describe and express their identities differently and may or may not consider themselves to be transgender (a general term for people whose gender identity or expression differs from the gender assigned to them at birth), they commonly understand themselves in ways that challenge binary constructions of gender." [57]

Clare drew an analogy between categorization of books and gender categorization. He said:

> One of the things that I often say when I do transgender awareness work is that...there's so much evidence to suggest that humans are such creatures of categorization. And what's also true is any categorization system that gets created, there will be things in that system which are always on the lines between categories, on the edges of the categories, or outside the categories...there's just not a way of categorizing that's going to effectively reflect the whole range of any way of being, whether it's geology, or mammals, or books, or genders, or whatever.

Communication scholars Susan Leigh Star and Geoffrey C. Bowker express a similar idea, saying, "If one examines any category, or any classification scheme, and looks at its genesis, it is clear that a category is something like a treaty or a cover of some sort that hides the messier version of what is inside."[58] Clare framed the problem inherent in

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[57] Beemyn, "Genderqueer."

[58] Susan Leigh Star and Geoffrey C. Bowker, "Enacting Silence: Residual Categories as a Challenge for Ethics, Information Systems, and Communication," *Ethics and Information Technology* 9, no. 4 (2007): 273.

imposing a classification system onto the messiness of life, saying, "What do you do with this tension between the urge to categorize and the embedded limitations of systems of categorization?"

Clare suggested that part of the answer to this conundrum lies in acknowledging the limitations of classification and incorporating that knowledge into system design:

> No system is going to reflect the whole range of ways of existing, being, and naming. Just to have that knowledge go into the knowledge of that particular system is going to help – figuring out what category systems reflect more of the whole range rather than less of the whole range.

By stating that some category systems might reflect "more of the whole range rather than less of the whole range," Clare implied that some categorization systems are better than others, and therefore that the inherent limitations of knowledge organization systems should not be used as a rationale for failing to evaluate, improve, or choose between them.

Another way to address the tension generated by classification, Clare said, is to be attentive to the treatment of items that defy categorization:

> How can we create a category system that acknowledges that it won't encompass everything easily or well, and how do you build into the system what falls outside, what falls on the lines? … Do we punish them, do we embrace them, do we let the category system flex for them, do we gatekeep, do we silence, do we celebrate?

Clare identified important ethical questions that must be confronted when one acknowledges the limitations of categorization. Bowker and Star use the term "residual categories" to discuss the items that defy classification and are grouped into categories labeled "other." They state, "Residual categories have their own texture that operates like the silences in a symphony to pattern the visible categories and their boundaries."[59]

CONCLUSIONS

Subject description is one of the most important things librarians do. By representing what items are "about" in a systematic and thoughtful way, librarians provide access points that would not otherwise exist. Of course, subject headings do not always lead users to the items they need. As a technology for information access,

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[59] Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 325.

subject headings are complemented by other technologies such as full-text searching, user tags, algorithms that generate recommendations, and curated lists.

Outside the library profession, even among library stakeholders like authors and researchers, there is little awareness of how and when subject headings are created and selected. By improving the way we communicate about subject headings, librarians can strengthen our relationships and demystify our work. In calling for librarians to improve the way we communicate about subject description, I am not simply calling for us to raise awareness about the purpose and use of headings. The engagement we invite should be critical and should address questions of power. Authors and researchers are often concerned with questions of language and representation. Activist authors like Clare think a lot about power and privilege. By letting authors know that librarians are also concerned with these topics, we open the door to interesting and liberating partnerships. As Clare demonstrated, authors can move quickly from not having thought much about subject headings to offering sophisticated analyses of individual headings and of the categorization project itself. Engaging with authors might mean opening ourselves up to criticism and controversy, which we should be willing to accept and embrace with open minds.

Increased engagement with authors might take several forms. In the library and information science literature, interviews with authors have rarely been used to investigate research questions. As this article demonstrates, conducting qualitative interviews with authors is an effective methodology. This methodology might productively be applied to a variety of subjects; authors can help librarians gain new insights not only about knowledge organization, but also about other topics such as the publishing ecosystem.

Some types of author engagement might lead to changes in cataloging practice. For example, the Library of Congress could solicit author-supplied keywords for the Cataloging in Publication program. Keywords should not be used in place of standardized headings, but they could help catalogers identify the most salient aspects of books. Catalogers should consult with subject experts, especially when working in new fields. In the case of *Exile and Pride*, subject experts could have identified the political implications of using the term "cerebral palsied." They could also have recommended a subject heading to represent the idea of queerness. These recommendations apply mostly to original cataloging done at the Library of Congress and by participants in the Program for Cooperative Cataloging.

After catalog records have been created by the Library of Congress, librarians copy them into their local catalogs. If local catalogers notice problematic records at this stage, they have several options. Librarians have a long history of adding additional subject headings to local records. In some cases, an appropriate heading exists in the list authorized by the Library of Congress, but was not applied to the book in question. In the case of *Exile and Pride,* a cataloger might add the authorized headings "Sexual minorities" and "People with disabilities—Civil rights." On rare occasions, when there is

no Library of Congress subject heading that reflects the concept in question, catalogers may decide to add local headings that are not authorized. Daniel CannCasciato, for example, writes about implementing "Election reform" as a local heading after the Library of Congress rejected his proposal that they add it as an authorized heading.[60] In adding unauthorized headings, catalogers give up some of the advantages of a standardized controlled vocabulary, but they might decide that the benefits to their local patrons outweigh the costs. In a blog post discussion with Jenna Freedman, Tina Gross writes that she assigns "copious uncontrolled terms" but identifies an important advantage of the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH): "Controlled vocabulary requires ongoing updating and maintenance, that's a built-in part of the endeavor. At most institutions, in most systems, LCSH is far more likely to be supported and maintained in this way than any other [controlled vocabulary] or locally assigned terms."[61]

In the case of *Exile and Pride*, a cataloger might choose to create local headings like "Queer people" or "Disability culture," although these are not headings recognized by the Library of Congress. Librarians have recognized for years that the concept of queer identity, though widespread in the literary record, is not part of the Library of Congress Subject Headings except in the term "Queer theory."[62] The authorized terms "Gays" and "Lesbians" are related to queerness, but not the same. People who identify as queer often seek to blur and dismantle binary understandings of "man / woman" and "straight / gay." The authorized heading "Sexual minorities," which includes the "Use for" references to "LGBTQ people" and "Non-heterosexual people," comes closest to capturing the concept of queer identity, although it is not a commonly used phrase and not often chosen for self-identification. Some argue that "it is completely 'un-queer' to define *queer*,"[63] since queerness depends on resisting easy categories. Because queer identity is so widespread in the cultural record, however, it would be a logical addition to a list of local headings or to the Library of Congress Subject Headings. The concept of disability culture, like the concept of queerness, is not well represented in the Library of Congress Subject Headings and is somewhat difficult to define. There is disagreement in the literature about whether disability culture exists as an entity and whether another

[60] Daniel CannCasciato, "'Respect My Authoritah': Eric Cartman and Enhanced Subject Access," in *Radical Cataloging: Essays at the Front*, by K. R. Roberto (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2008), 265–68.

[61] Jenna Freedman, "Can I Quit You, LC?," Lower East Side Librarian, 2016, http://lowereastsidelibrarian.info/lcsh/quityou.

[62] Ellen Greenblatt, "The Treatment of LBGTIQ Concepts in the Library of Congress Subject Headings," in *Serving LGBTIQ Library and Archives Users: Essays on Outreach, Service, Collections and Access* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2011).

[63] Kristen Barber and Danielle Antoinette Hidalgo, "Queer," in *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society*, ed. Jodi O'Brien, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009), 689-690.

term, like disability consciousness, better describes it.[64] Whether or not "disability culture" is the exact term chosen, the Library of Congress Subject Headings (or a set of local headings) would be enriched by a heading that represents the concept of shared identity among people with disabilities.[65]

Incorporating user-generated tags into library catalogs is another way librarians can improve representation of material related to gender, sexuality, and disability. In a study of LibraryThing tags and Library of Congress Subject Headings for books discussing transgender experiences, Adler finds that the uncontrolled keywords generated by users create a folksonomy that represents books in rich and nuanced ways. She writes that library catalogs should combine user-generated tags with controlled vocabularies to maximize the advantages of both.[66]

Even when author engagement does not lead to changes in practice, it can be useful as an end in itself. As Drabinski[67] argues, there is value in encouraging non-librarians to reflect on the way that power and representation play out in library catalogs. Critical readings of subject headings can be used in teaching, both in library instruction classrooms and in other disciplines. Students, scholars, and practitioners inside and outside of librarianship can wrestle with Clare's question, "How can we create a category system that acknowledges that it won't encompass everything easily or well, and how do you build into the system what falls outside, what falls on the lines?"

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[64] Sharon N. Barnartt, "Disability Culture or Disability Consciousness?," *Journal of Disability Policy Studies* 7, no. 2 (1996): 1–19, doi:10.1177/104420739600700201.

[65] Steven Brown, "What Is Disability Culture?," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (April 15, 2002), http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/343.

[66] Adler, "Transcending Library Catalogs."

[67] Drabinski, "Queering the Catalog."

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