Inclusive Cataloging

Histories, Context, and Reparative Approaches

Edited by Amber Billey, Elizabeth Nelson, and Rebecca Uhl

IN COLLABORATION WITH CORE

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Introduction

Amber Billey

SIXTEEN YEARS AGO IN LIBRARY SCHOOL AT PRATT INSTITUTE, I WAS introduced to the work of Sandy Berman by professor and longtime editor emeritus of *Library Journal*, John N. Berry III, in his "Introduction to the Profession" class. The assignment was to write a short biography of a "famous" librarian. When I told Professor Berry that I was interested in cataloging and technical services, without hesitation he recommended that I look into the work of Sandy Berman.

Berman's biography was only available at the New York Public Library's Schwarzman Building.[1] It was a blustery fall afternoon on 42nd Street when I climbed the marble stairs between the two enormous lions, Patience and Fortitude, to spend the day reading about a librarian whose work and activism changed the profession and would also change the course of mine. To get the book, I waited in line to meet with a librarian who wrote my request on a carbon form that was shot through a pneumatic tube to be retrieved and fetched by clerks hidden deep beneath Bryant Park. I watched for my number to light up when the book was ready to check out. Once I had the book in hand, I found my way to a seat in the enormous and glorious reading room where I read Sandy Berman's biography from cover to cover in one sitting. I learned about his work to critically and relentlessly advocate for social justice and ethical changes to library cataloging and classification standards

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in the second half of the twentieth century—primarily through persistence and a typewriter.

Berman's work inspired me to question the authority of library authorities and standards, to be critical of decision-makers and so-called "best" practices, and to be vocal about injustices within our library systems of organization. During the first decade of my career, I advocated for gender inclusivity in name authority records and for removing stigma and bias in subject headings and classification. The work was slow and at times frustrating. So many hours were spent in committee or task group meetings and writing reports that resulted in little or no change; however, with patience and, indeed, fortitude, in time changes were made for the better.

During the summer of 2020, the murder of George Floyd generated a swell of racial reckoning across the United States. In libraries, it shined a bright spotlight on the bias and oppression found within our collections and organization systems. With so many librarians working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, attention quickly shifted to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts and what librarians could do to improve our problematic past. As a result, many librarians working in technical services started projects to address bias, oppression, and inequity in library catalogs, collections, and policies. Catalogers began to create lists of Library of Congress Subject Headings and Classification that needed to be updated or changed; archivists revisited their descriptive practices that centered white colonial Christian cisgender heterosexual male perspectives and histories, which often negated or othered marginalized and oppressed peoples; librarians began to perform diversity audits of their collections; and libraries published "harmful content" or bias statements.

These efforts were generally adopted and celebrated, as well as presented at webinars, conferences, and annual meetings. It's important to document this work so that future generations of librarians know and understand what has been accomplished and what work still remains to be done. As a profession we understand the impact of the written word and the historical record. Therefore, this volume seeks to record the efforts of so many librarians who have worked to improve our systems and collections, as well as to inspire those who have yet to enact change that this work is scalable, possible, and necessary.

This book is organized into two sections: "History and Theory" and "Case Studies." As one might expect, the "History and Theory" section includes

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chapters that range from highly theoretical ones challenging readers to reconsider their perspectives, to chapters documenting our history, and to others recounting recent efforts to enact change within the profession. The theory lays the foundation for the actions that create our history. The chapters in the "Case Studies" section seek both to document what different libraries have accomplished to address bias and oppression, and to inspire other libraries to do this work too. Libraries of all kinds are represented within these pages—from small to large, public to academic, consortia, special libraries, and archives. The case studies address problematic issues such as correcting classification and subject analysis, creating harmful content statements, and conducting diversity audits for collection development.

Change in libraries has happened relatively quickly since the summer of 2020. We have experienced a shift within the profession. Librarians understand the importance of this work, and we finally have the support of our professional authorities (ALA, PCC, and LC) to enact progressive change toward the goal that no user is faced with bias and oppression by simply using the library and our systems of organization. With this book we document both what has been accomplished and what still needs to be done, and we hope to inspire others to take up this work. As Sandy Berman is famously quoted saying, "I can't have information I know would be of interest to someone and not share it."

We, the editors, are honored to share this information with you.

The editors would like to thank our family, friends, and colleagues for their support. Thanks to our library administrations for their understanding while we worked on this book. A special thanks to Jamie Santoro, Samantha Kundert, and the ALA Editions team for patiently answering all of our questions. And deep gratitude to the 67 contributing authors who made this volume possible.

NOTE

1. Chris Dodge and Jan DeSirey, eds., *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sandy Berman but Were Afraid to Ask* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1995).

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PART I

History and Theory

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1

Ways of Knowing

The Worlds Words Create

Amanda Belantara and Emily Drabinski

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RICHARD CHABRÁN DESCRIBES SEARCHING FOR LIBRARY MATERIALS about the Chicano experience as a student at the University of California, Berkeley, in the 1970s. The main library was and still is organized using the Library of Congress Classification (LCC) and its associated subject headings (LCSH):

> The terminology that was used in order to provide access was not what I would use, like a term like "Illegal aliens." This is them trying to socialize me, how I was going to call and look up and think about things that I did not think of in those terms. It was really objectionable to me to use those terms. There were also customs that we would have a certain name for and weren't very well represented by the English term that was used. So it was a linguistic thing, it was a political thing, it was a cultural thing. All of those things didn't work for us.[1]

As Chabrán makes plain, dominant knowledge organization systems do not work for many of us. They represent and reproduce a world that Sanford Berman has described as composed of "parochial, jingoistic Europeans and North Americans, white-hued, at least nominally Christian (and preferably Protestant) in faith, comfortably situated in the middle-and higher-income brackets,

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largely domiciled in suburbia, fundamentally loyal to the Established Order, and heavily imbued with the transcendent, incomparable glory of Western civilization."[2] If these systems are the only intellectual access tools, "those who do not fit in are neglected, silenced, delegitimized or simply considered exotic, religious, mythological: not real."[3] With more than a century of reinscription through the cataloging and classification work of librarians, systems that reflect this singular worldview can be cast as neutral, objective, and real. But as Chabrán articulates, these dominant systems are and have long been both insufficient and exclusionary.

The Ways of Knowing Oral History Collection documents the stories behind the alternative controlled vocabularies and knowledge organization systems created in response to these system failures. By "alternative," we mean systems that depart from widely used standards such as the Dewey Decimal System (DDS), the Library of Congress Classification System (LCC), and the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH). Many authors address bias in library classification and descriptive systems in library and information science literature. Authors across disciplines have called out the ways "modern knowledge works to make invisible other knowledges and ways of being" and have surfaced the epistemic injustices that pervade the field.[4] Olson recounts how European philosophical frameworks "led to the presumption [of a] need for a universal language understood by all."[5] Mignolo further asserts that the "universalization of Western universality" was key to imperial projects.[6] Indeed, library classification and cataloging itself emerged from Enlightenment-era efforts to order the entire world.[7] These dominant intellectual infrastructures echo through the fixed systems used for organizing libraries around the globe. But they are not and do not need to be the only way of organizing or describing information. In the next section, we turn to the world-building work of alternative descriptive and classification systems.

THE WORLDS WORDS CREATE

We call alternative knowledge organization projects "world-building work" with intention. "World-building" is a term commonly used for literary genres that traffic in the imaginary. We find the concept of world-building to be analytically useful for understanding how thesauri both describe and produce

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worlds. In libraries, that world is the catalog. As users connect with materials by using a particular subject heading, they repeat a vision of the world, reifying and validating a particular *term* as a real thing. We argue that alternative knowledge organization systems are world-building projects that cultivate *pluriversal* thinking. They offer opportunities to counter the narrative of a "one-world world" that dominant library organizing systems reinscribe.[8] Rather than trying to fit into previously defined worlds, creators of alternative thesauri build their own. Each thesaurus makes it materially clear that a single universal knowledge organization system cannot exist, as there is no single way of knowing.

The *pluriverse*, a term used by the Zapatistas to describe "a world in which many worlds fit," has been widely used by scholars across the humanities to challenge colonialism and universalist philosophies. While philosophers continue to debate whether a multiplicity of worlds is in fact achievable,[9] we are inspired by the work of Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena, who point to the pluriverse as "the opportunity for a condition to emerge that, instead of destruction, thrives on the encounter of heterogeneous worldings, taking place alongside each other with their divergent here(s) and now(s)."[10] The terms from alternative thesauri "present themselves with what makes them be—in all their heterogeneity."[11] In contrast to the "norm" of dominant library systems, they do not "resolve in ontologically homogeneous grounds," but instead create what Blaser and de la Cadena call an "uncommons," a forum and "constant starting point" in which divergent groups simultaneously exist as *themselves*.[12]

The Ways of Knowing Oral History Collection includes interviews with participants from three of these world-making projects: the Chicano Thesaurus, the Women's Thesaurus, and the Homosaurus. With the support of the Metropolitan New York Library Council's Equity in Action Grant, in 2022 the authors recorded oral histories with two people involved in building each of these alternative thesauri: Richard Chabrán and Lillian Castillo-Speed, co-creators of the Chicano Thesaurus; Mary Ellen Capek and Sarah Pritchard, who collaborated on the Women's Thesaurus; and K. J. Rawson and Adrian Williams, two members of the Homosaurus Editorial Board. The authors quote and reference their responses from these interviews throughout this chapter. More information about these thesauri, including the oral history interviews and transcripts, can be accessed online.[13]

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INFORMATION TOOLS ARE FOR USE

> Though I'm certainly committed to the endless proliferation of language as a rhetorician, there is a real practical value in having a set list of terms to apply in information environments so that people can better discover resources.
>
> —*K. J. Rawson, chair of the Homosaurus Editorial Board, from the Ways of Knowing Oral History Collection*

Practical tools enabling discovery, retrieval, and use are key for any collection, providing access to the multitude of works produced and circulated in communities. The Chicano Thesaurus, Women's Thesaurus, and Homosaurus explicitly counter universalizing projects. These are not projects focused on *inclusion* into existing systems. Instead, they are intended for use by the communities they describe, developed out of a very practical need for access tools that work.

Lillian Castillo-Speed described the situation that early library staff at the Chicano Studies Library encountered when trying to use the Library of Congress Classification (LCC) to organize the emerging collection:

> They saw right away that if they used the Library of Congress classification system, everything in the Chicano Library would be under E184-something. That would just be so unusable . . . so they decided to take over the classification system on their own.

Similarly, the Women's Thesaurus was created when the National Council for Research on Women couldn't make the holdings of nationwide women's centers' collections searchable using standardized terms. Mary Ellen Capek noted that preexisting vocabularies "didn't contain any of the language that we needed to describe the work . . . they didn't even have language like 'domestic violence' or 'sexual harassment' in their thesauri." Instead of revising a set of terms that had been created in part through their exclusion, the Women's Thesaurus Task Force built an access tool of their own.

Access depends not only on the presence of appropriate terms but also on the existence of categories that can capture the intellectual and cultural production of various movements. Such decisions about sameness and difference are world-building work as knowledge workers decide what matters enough to warrant its own category, what can be subsumed under other, perhaps competing ideas, and how ideas are related to each other. Richard Chabrán

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described one of the differences between the Library of Congress Classification scheme and the Chicano Classification scheme:

> [In LCC] Chicano literature could either be [grouped] with the Spanish stuff *or* the English stuff. José made a PX classification for Chicano [literature] as we thought of it all as one thing, not something separate that was inherited from a European system that didn't make any sense.

Developers of the Chicano Thesaurus and Classification did not push for the Library of Congress to add PX to its class divisions; instead, they reconfigured tools from one world to order and manifest their own.

INFORMATION TOOLS AS WORLDING

Beyond the demand for a meaningful information retrieval tool, the power of these projects is in the worlds they represent and simultaneously co-create. Rawson explains:

> One of the ways that we've thought about the purpose of the Homosaurus is to make more words available . . . making things legible and possible so that when a user starts doing searches, they can find the information that they're seeking in that space where it might not have been searchable or discoverable before . . . how mind-blowing when they actually then can find materials related to that term, right?

Castillo-Speed is also explicit about the ways the Chicano Thesaurus and Chicano Classification System contributed to the world-building work of the Chicano movement. The Chicano Studies Library was its own world and required a system to organize and describe it.

> [Library staff] altered [LCC] so it could reflect how the world should look from their point of view. The shelves of a library are like a world in themselves with all these different areas. If you have the courage to include all these words that my grandmother used or these words that I grew up with and these words that we know among us that we use all the time, we're going to just say yes. Even the word Chicano. To call yourself Chicano or call anything Chicano, you're already taking a stand against a lot of other stuff.

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For Castillo-Speed, language is explicitly political. Using some terms and not others is about more than access—it's also about the claiming of terms that shape how a world is represented and therefore understood. Capek also spoke to the world-building capacity of language used in the Women's Thesaurus: "the vision there was really to transform how the world thought about women and girls." She continued:

> The goal was not to give [database engineers] a whole new language. They would never have used it. These are mostly guys and they're mostly arrogant and they're mostly convinced they have the handle around the world that they know and understand and articulate. And what we were trying to do was say, "Whoa guys, wait a minute. We have a few other pieces of reality we want you to look at."

These terms now exist as something that can be known and searched for in the catalog, enabling multiple ways of knowing. That experience of placing oneself or one's reality in the vocabulary is part of the world-building work that alternative metadata projects do. "Making things legible and possible" creates a space for recognition and belonging.

Sometimes, world-making requires deletion, another way of defining the scope of a world. Rawson recounts the Homosaurus Editorial Board's decision to do just this:

> The original Homosaurus was meant to be a stand-alone vocabulary, so it included broader terms that really weren't LGBTQ-specific, like "Performance" or "Family" or "Art." We determined that we wanted to focus exclusively on queer language and terminology. Once we decided to do that, the next few meetings we caught every term that was not sufficiently queer. You can imagine the joy of all these queer librarians and academics just being like, "Nope, not queer enough, not queer enough." And just deleting, deleting, deleting. We have deleted maybe 800 terms.

COMMUNITY-BUILDING AS WORLDING

The "joy" of "deleting, deleting, deleting" is an expression of a shared experience, a coming together that is in itself world-making. The Homosaurus

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Editorial Board, a community of queer metadata makers, crafts worlds word by word, making shared decisions they recognize they might one day change. Meetings offer space where members can be themselves, speak openly, and share experiences. Rawson describes the atmosphere of a Homosaurus Editorial Board meeting when new terms were under discussion.

> It was just this beautifully charming moment where *we were all in on it together*. We were talking about something that we knew the straight world around us was not in on and we would just laugh and giggle. Some of the terms that we have in the vocabulary are just funny, especially when you say them aloud in a group of queer and trans folks who don't get to talk about these things aloud very often.

Chabrán also described the way the thesaurus project enabled connection beyond the vocabulary itself.

> When [the Chicano Studies] collections first started to develop, there was a little bit of competition between the different collections. Everybody wanted to have their own thing. It was a watershed moment to say, "We're going to do something together." We were not going to try to one-up each other. We were going to do this together, whatever turned out. It was really empowering, the establishment of a political identity, a group that worked together and struggled together on a lot of different things.

In Chabrán's memory, we hear the way the Chicano Thesaurus project contributed to the political and organizational culture of the Chicano movement and the Chicano world.

Once developed and deployed, alternative thesauri expand the worlds they create, making worlds larger across time and geography as others use the vocabularies. In her interview, Capek described how one reader engaged the Women's Thesaurus.

> She said she used it because she would get very discouraged by all the sexism she was up against. One day she went into her office and shut the door and just started browsing [the Women's Thesaurus]. And she laughed and laughed and laughed. And she said ever since that one time, she did that regularly. Whenever she got depressed or overwhelmed, she would just go in and read it.

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More than just an access tool, the Women's Thesaurus located its users in a shared world through a joyful recognition of their own struggles in a shared language. Capek suggests that the Women's Thesaurus itself became a form of self-care and a mental health resource for its readers, whether they used the vocabulary for information discovery or not.

TOWARD THE PLURIVERSAL

Alternative thesauri resist knowledge-organizing practices that prioritize the creation of terms that are authoritatively and *universally correct* and push instead toward continuous growth and change within, through, and alongside the communities they describe. As thesauri are developed, they contribute to a pluriversal world in which many can fit. Homosaurus Editorial Board member Adrian Williams explains:

> I think of Homosaurus in the same way that you think of a living document. It's going to change. You can make a change one month and then have to make it again the next month. The changes that we make to the vocabulary are not permanent. They might not even be long-standing. Each change we make is for currency, it's for intuitiveness, it's for the living people that are using this and searching using it.

The world-building of the Homosaurus does not require the elimination or correction of other systems. Indeed, the vocabulary can coexist with rather than replace Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH). Williams explained their cataloging philosophy:

> Adding Homosaurus [terms] to these records improves search. It adds more context and more terms that a user might search by. For the most part, I'm not taking out any LCSH. I'm only adding another way for people to search for this work.
>
> *Belantara:* Can you talk about your philosophy behind that decision?
>
> *Williams:* At an academic library, our primary audience is undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty. Within those groups, there's a diversity of perspective and life experience and just familiarity with LGBTQ topics. Yes, I could take out that LCSH that

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> has that more medicalized perspective and that more conservative perspective, but that would also mean that people less familiar with current LGBTQ terminology would have more trouble finding it. Keeping both the LCSH and adding the Homosaurus makes it so that more people can find what we have.

In their work as an editorial board member of the Homosaurus and as a cataloging librarian, Williams helps create a catalog in which many worlds fit. Williams wants more people from all kinds of worlds to find materials. As with other thesauri like this one, the project is about expanding worlds, not narrowing or eliminating them.

Alternative thesauri projects constitute the concrete world-building of the thesaurus makers who gather together to generate, debate, eliminate, and select terms and make decisions. They also build a world for the people who interact with the vocabulary to search, browse, and retrieve information. Participants in these worlds find recognition in the new vocabulary, while scope notes and other ancillary materials provide a way into the world for those outside of it. In this way, such projects contribute to a pluriverse, challenging previous conceptions (limitations) of what and how something can be known and pushing forward a reimagined catalog.

CONCLUSION

The problems in standard cataloging and classification systems in libraries have long been recognized. The Dewey Decimal Classification and the Library of Congress Classification and their accompanying vocabularies document normative ways of knowing that efface difference, whether through the absence of relevant terms ("Literatura Chicanesca," "Domestic violence," "Transgender beaches") or the inclusion of offensive terms ("Illegal aliens," "Women doctors," "Transgenderism"). One approach to managing these exclusions is to push for edits and revisions to existing dominant vocabularies. Such work has played a crucial role in surfacing the problem of bias in library systems to the general library public.

The projects documented in the Ways of Knowing Oral History Collection take a different approach. Rather than revising someone else's universe, they reify their own. This approach has a long history in the library field as

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knowledge workers have built tools to enable meaningful access to their own literature.[14] The Chicano Thesaurus, Women's Thesaurus, and Homosaurus are examples of knowledge projects that focus on the words we use and the worlds those words make. Members of multiple worlds build new knowledge and recognize themselves in systems built by and for them.

These are world-building projects of great and important scale. They convene members of particular worlds on behalf of the description and documentation of those worlds. Participants connect with one another through the process of building these vocabularies. In doing so, they offer a world to others, too. As library members interact with these vocabularies, they recognize themselves as part of a world, expanding its borders through reuse and reinscription in ways that mirror what happens with normative systems. The difference is that these worlds exist on their own terms.

In turning attention to these worlds as wholly legitimate on their own, not as adjuncts to or revisions of dominant systems, we can begin to see the library field as constituted by multiple worlds, part of a pluriverse where many ways of knowing and being can flourish.

This is world-building work worth doing.

FURTHER READINGS

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