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Introduction

Early in 2021 a new Cataloguing Code of Ethics[1] was issued. The need for such a document had been formally recognized five years earlier at an American Library Association meeting. Representatives from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (United Kingdom), the Canadian Federation of Library Associations, and the American Library Association collaborated to produce the document.[2]   As noted in its Definitions section, the Code aimed to "provide an intentional decision-making framework for those who work in cataloguing or metadata positions."[3] The intended audience is broad: "practitioners, employers, standards' developers, vendors, students, and educators."[4] I wanted to assess the place of this document in the history of our profession's cataloging values, as well as imagine how its provisions could be applied in today's work environment.

Reflections on the Ten Statements

The introductory matter to the Ethical Principles summarizes that "Cataloguing standards and practices are currently and historically characterised by racism, white supremacy, colonialism, othering, and oppression."[5]

1. *We catalogue resources in our collections with the end-user in mind to facilitate access and promote discovery.*

It has long been a principle in our service-oriented profession to provide potential users of materials as full a set of metadata as possible.   Examinations of which data elements were the most essential to retain in the Program for Cooperative Cataloging's BIBCO and CONSER Standard Records have turned on what user tasks those data elements have helped to accomplish. In the spirit of Ranganathan's fourth law, "Save the time of the reader,"[6] we have striven to include those data elements that would best enable a reader to decide if a given resource was worth further pursuing, be it a trip to the open stacks or submission of request for retrieval from remote storage or for an interlibrary loan.   We employ controlled vocabularies in assigning subject terms, relieving users of the need to dredge up all the synonyms needed for thorough searching. The cataloging community is opening up to the idea of using more inclusive vocabularies alongside traditional ones, e.g. Homosaurus,[7] which reflect language users use to search for library materials. It could be said that even the daily decisions on which materials get selected for cataloging from a backlog, and which materials are allowed to languish there, are potential reflections of biases.

2. *We commit to describing resources without discrimination whilst respecting the privacy and preferences of their associated agents.*

Descriptions of library resources are expected to be opinion-free. Cataloging neutrality has long been an aspiration, if not yet fully realized. Transcription is used for key data elements whenever the needed data is available. When a title for a document has to be "supplied by a cataloger," neutral language is used. Catalogers do not evaluate or judge the quality of the content of the material being described.   We information professionals have control over the descriptive

metadata *we* provide within a description, but as for the language appearing in transcribed elements, we do not.

A dynamic tension exists between what personal information a document creator would like public audiences to have available about themself and what demographic data a reader would like to have access to.   I have addressed those competing needs previously in this space.[8] Another type of preference sometimes expressed by the creators of documents is for the specific form of name presented in text strings appearing in our discovery tools. In a day and age when identity management is ascendant, where the identifier is the prime means of distinguishing and tracking a creator, libraries are becoming freer to grant requests to change text strings to match author preferences.

3. *We acknowledge that we bring our biases to the workplace; therefore, we strive to overcome personal, institutional, and societal prejudices in our work.*

A major 20th century force in sensitizing new librarians to the types of biases to be aware of and seek to rectify was Sandy Berman, the author of *Prejudices and Antipathies*.[9] After years of providing critiques of the language in Library of Congress Subject Headings, his alternative subject headings used at Hennepin County Library in Minnesota became a regular reference source consulted by LC when reviewing proposed new topical terms in the Subject Authority Cooperative (SACO) Program of the PCC.   The upsurge in training in the past couple of years focused on equity, diversity, and inclusion has heightened awareness of the biases inhabiting our work.

4. *We recognise that interoperability and consistent application of standards help our users find and access materials. However, all standards are biased;*

we will approach them critically and advocate to make cataloguing more

inclusive.

One wonders about the generalization of "all standards." Does that include

standards that essentially are mere numbers, such as the International Standard

Book/Serial Number (ISBN, ISSN)? Is it the standard itself that is biased, or is it

sometimes the application of the standard? Does the making of "cataloging more

inclusive" envision a striving to improve the standard, or is it more a matter of

reaching for workarounds to compensate for the irredeemably-flawed standards?

Another matter of concern is who gets to participate in setting and revising

standards. At some point, the need for a completely new standard will be identified.

5. *We support efforts to make standards and tools financially, intellectually, and*

   technologically accessible to all cataloguers, and developed with evidence-

   based research and stakeholder input.

A number of the basic tools and standards cited in the requirements segments of

professional position announcements are freely available online.[10] To work in some

files or with some tools, an institutional membership and/or a subscription is

required. The cataloging code *Resource Description and Access* has been

translated into eight other languages beyond English.[11] A number of institutions

have committed to making their metadata freely available; this also includes the

PCC and OCLC's WorldCat.[12]

6. *We take responsibility for our cataloguing decisions and advocate for*

   transparency in our institutional practices and policies.

The decision summaries on proposed changes to LC Subject Headings and

Classification issued by the Library of Congress are a good example of explaining

why proposals get turned down or tabled.[13] Many institutions make their cataloging

policy and procedure documentation publicly available. The same is true of the standards for the Program for Cooperative Cataloging's bibliographic and authority data. I remember the admonition in library school that "cataloging is not brain surgery," meaning that it was always possible to revisit metadata and make revisions to it as warranted.

7. *We collaborate widely to support the creation, distribution, maintenance, and enrichment of metadata in various environments and jurisdictions.*

Willingness to work collaboratively in shared files brings great efficiency and reduces duplication of effort. Broadening this concept beyond libraries to include collaboration with other parties in the information ecosphere, such as publishers, vendors, rights management agencies, and others, further expands the number of resources receiving fuller metadata. While libraries seek to influence the metadata standards and practices used by those other parties, it is true that they will have less direct control over the metadata.

8. *We insist on diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. We promote education, training, equitable pay, and a fair work environment for everyone who catalogues so that they can continue to support search and discovery.*

We, the very large majority of us in the profession, value having a work site that resembles the community we live in, as well as the constituents we are cataloging for. We aspire to staff our units with the skills needed to describe the materials being added to the collection, which will include a variety of human and machine languages.

9. *We advocate for the value of cataloguing work within our organisations and with external partners.*

I still remember collecting a promotional button from the OCLC exhibit booth at an ALA conference that asserted "Cataloging is a public service." Part of ensuring the ongoing perceived viability and necessity of metadata positions is reconceptualizing vacancies and matching them to new and emerging library needs. A memorable example of advocating the value of metadata to external partners was the PCC's convincing vendors of aggregator databases that title-level access was needed to represent the serials contained within those databases. The clincher was going beyond that contention to show the vendors how that could actually be achieved by cloning skeletal e-version records from the CONSER print versions. Once loaded into online catalogs, the database usage stats grew exponentially.

10. *We work with our user communities to understand their needs in order to provide relevant and timely services.*

When I led the University of California's Bibliographic Services Task Force,[14] we sought to understand specifically why users were experiencing greater satisfaction utilizing the Google and Amazon search interfaces—presence of a single search box for targeting all types of materials, a tool easy and intuitive enough to use without first needing bibliographic instruction.   More recently we have witnessed growth in user desires for faceting in search tools, and a decline in the demand for browse index displays.

Most if not all of these principles have had a long-standing history and prior precedents in our profession. They have been on our radar in some form and at least to some extent previously.

Broader Considerations on the Application of the Code of Ethics

In the code's implementation, should we focus our attention primarily on today's and tomorrow's processing workloads? Within current cataloging workloads, how do we balance the potential increase in time needed to critically catalog with the fact that productivity/volume of what we can process is one of our important metrics that we report on? Also, how much energy can we practically apply to remediating past descriptive work, when letting completely unprocessed materials sit in backlogs with no description at all represents its own problem? Describing some of the more recently acquired materials sitting in those backlogs perhaps could enable the library's collections to become more representative of the society we live in. Should those materials then be a particular priority? Perhaps the compromise is that we will largely confine our efforts in remediating legacy metadata to those things that can be achieved via *batch* actions. These are some of the considerations as we pursue "the goal of making metadata inclusive and resources accessible."[15]

In deciding which biases in standards and practices to pursue corrections for, is there a need to triage those that cause the most grievous harm and correspondingly deploy our energies?   If one zooms out to a macro-level view of the Library of Congress Classification scheme, there has always been a bothersome inconsistency in the treatment of various demographic groups, which have been the subject of social movements in the United States.   African Americans and the Civil Rights movement have classed under History, as "Elements in the population" (E184.4-E185.98). Women and the feminist movement have been classed under Sociology as part of sex role (HQ1100-HQ2030.7). LGBTQ+ and the gay rights movement are classed under Sociology as part of "Human sexuality" (HQ75.115-

HQ76.965), shortly after "Sexual practices outside of social norms."   Is it fair to say this high-level overview of the classification scheme is not visible to those browsing shelves physically or virtually, and perhaps not injurious? Is the more important goal a consistent application of the classification system to achieve helpful collocation in making materials available?

How would a library motivated to do something about the egregious LCSH term "Illegal aliens" be guided by the code of ethics?   Committing to lobby LC strenuously for changes clearly warranted in the vocabulary?   Going rogue and deliberately overriding the term officially preferred in the vocabulary at the local level?   Ameliorating the offending vocabulary by adding more acceptable terminology from a different vocabulary, e.g. uncontrolled keywords or Medical Subject Headings (MeSH)[16]:

> 653 $a Undocumented immigrants $a Noncitizens
> 650_2 $a Undocumented Immigrants

Using a form of "masking" to remap the offending terminology in the discovery layer, so the preferred language can be searched and displayed without needing to edit the actual metadata[17]? Probably it is safe to say the code would merely direct us to do *something*, and leave the choice up to our judgment.

We might be able to take steps to change our daily cataloging practice in house, since that is something we do have more control over. What of other providers of metadata that we consume? Would we impose quality assurance reviews of the metadata that arrives in our libraries via shelf-ready arrangements?

There would be less remediation of local copies of records, as our standards and awareness improve, if we sought to adopt a bibliographic ecosystem whereby we automatically obtain updates to bibliographic data improved at the network level. Another model would be simply pointing to a set of bibliographic data we consider to be our "database of record." In either case, improvements only need to be made one time, by one party, to benefit us all.

Over time the metadata we depend on for discovery is being provided by an increasingly broader array of sources. This implies that rolling up our sleeves and working harder and with more awareness is only part of the solution. We also will have to develop our advocacy skills as we lobby the other metadata providers that we can only influence, not control.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion provides a textbook case of why it continues to be necessary to have professionals within technical services. Who will assess the adequacy of existing cataloging standards for meeting user needs? Who will advocate for needed adjustments, including changes to controlled vocabularies? In situations where predictability and stability are lost, who will figure out what should be done on an interim or permanent basis?

[11] The final version of the Cataloguing Code of Ethics was issued in January 2021 https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IBz7nXQPfr3U1P6Xiar9cLAkzoNX_P9fq7eHvzfSlZ0/edit.

[2] The Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee membership, working documents, and two earlier drafts of the code are available at https://sites.google.com/view/cataloging-ethics/home

[3] Cataloging Code of Ethics, page 1

[4] Cataloging Code of Ethics, page 2

[5] Cataloging Code of Ethics, page 2

[6] Emily Rimland. "Ranganathan's Relevant Rules." *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 46(4): 24-26 (2007) https://www.journals.ala.org/index.php/rusq/article/viewFile/4090/4658

[7] Homosaurus: An International LGBTQ+ Linked Data Vocabulary https://homosaurus.org/

[8] John J. Riemer. "The Social Aspects of Identity Management Work." *Technicalities*, 40(3): 1-7 (May/June 2020) https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=llf&AN=145619633&site=ehost-live

[9] Sanford Berman. Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People. (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1971). See also Frederick J. Augustyn, Jr. "Cataloging the 1990s: Sanford Berman's Challenge to LC." Library of Congress Information Bulletin, 52(4) February 22, 1993. https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/93/9304/berman.html For general information about his influence and professional contributions, see the Sanford Berman Website https://www.sanfordberman.org/

[10] Examples include the Library of Congress' name and subject authority files https://authorities.loc.gov/ , the Faceted Application of Subject Terminology (FAST) vocabularies https://fast.oclc.org/searchfast/ , and the Getty Research Institute's vocabularies http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabularies .

[11] "RDA in Translation" (2016) https://www.rdatoolkit.org/translation . The predecessor code Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR2) was translated into many more. See Barbara Stern. "Internationalizing the Rules in the AACR2: Adopting and Translating the AACR2 for Use in Non-Anglo-American and Non-English-Speaking Cataloging Environments" Cataloging & Classification Quarterly 21(3-4): 37-60 (1996). https://doi.org/10.1300/J104v21n03_04

[12] "Harvard Library Bibliographic Dataset." https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/LZDQYN. The PCC has recently issued a new "Open Metadata Policy" in 2022: https://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/resources/PCC-Open-Metadata-Policy.pdf OCLC offers free access to WorldCat data in 13 different language interfaces https://www.worldcat.org/.

[13] Library of Congress. Summary of Decisions from the Weekly (and Monthly, as of May 2011) Editorial Meeting, 2005- https://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/saco/cpsoed/cpsoeditorial.html

[14] University of California. Bibliographic Services Task Force. "Rethinking How We Provide Bibliographic Services for the University of California." December 2005 https://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/groups/files/bstf/docs/Final.pdf

[15] Cataloging Code of Ethics, page 2

[16] MeSH Browser, https://meshb.nlm.nih.gov/record/ui?ui=D000069756

[17] In ExLibris' Primo Normalized XML (PNX) the term "Illegal aliens" is remapped. The normalization and transformation rules in Primo make it possible to change the display and support search of both terms in retrieval. For details, see: California State University Libraries

Network. "California State University Libraries to Change the Display of the Subject Heading "Illegal Aliens" in Joint Public Catalog." (2019) https://libraries.calstate.edu/csu-libraries-change-subject-heading-illegal-aliens