

LINKED, CONTROLLED FOLKSONOMY AS REPARATIVE TAXONOMY

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While libraries continue to struggle with budgets and keeping the proverbial and literal lights on, the way we describe materials has come under increased scrutiny. How can libraries catalog in a way that provides better discovery of their collections and in a way that is inclusive?

My presentation will give a brief overview of the LCSH and its problems and conclude with a proposal of a project I hope to take on to create a local vocabulary to help make the UMD Libraries' materials more discoverable by working with our own community.



- Controlled Vocabulary = collection of words to provide structure and consistency for resource discovery (think LCSH)
- Folksonomy = user generated vocabulary (think social media hashtags)
- Controlled folksonomy = vocabulary made up of terms selected from user-provided terms (AO3 canonical tags)



- Used to provide discovery of library resources based on content
- Top-down
- Can include hierarchy, relationships between terms, and variant terms

Washington Suburban Area

As a geographic subdivision, this heading is used directly.

Broader Terms

- Suburbs--Maryland
- Suburbs--Virginia
- Suburbs--Washington (D.C.)

Related Terms

- Washington Metropolitan Area
- Washington Region

Closely Matching Concepts from Other Schemes

- [Washington \(D.C.\) Suburban Area](#)

The LCSH is an essential aspect for libraries to enable their patrons to find and access materials in their collections. In the days of the card catalog, there were essentially 3 ways to find a book: by its title, its author, or the subject term. The LCSH is a sort of top-down approach. Someone looking for a book on a topic, could find the appropriate subject term in the vocabulary, and then search for that card in the card catalog to find relevant materials. This process is then top-down. Catalogers and other professionals have established a vocabulary and terms, and then users find out what term is used for what they're looking for. An example of a controlled vocabulary, is the Library of Congress Subject Headings commonly known as LCSH. This is the dominant source of subject terms for library catalogs.



- What is wrong with controlled vocabularies?
 - Outdated, offensive terminology
 - Local vocabulary applied universally

Indians

Here are entered works on the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere, including Eskimos. Works on citizens of India who are not currently residing in India are entered under [East Indians.]

East Indians

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The main concern is outdated and offensive terminology. The LCSH was first published in 1898, not only has a lot changed in that time between now and then, today we can recognize assumptions and biases baked into the vocabulary that were veiled as unbiased. Some of these biases also led to offensive and even bigoted terms being included in the vocabulary. This not only can harm and turn away community members, but it can also inhibit access to library materials. Controlled vocabularies like the LCSH also aim for universality. While the vocabulary is really a national vocabulary for the United States, so its ability to work for people outside the United States is limited.



Berman	Drabinski	Adler
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Prejudices and Antipathies</i> (1971)• Update/fix subject terms• PCC funnels, etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Queering the catalog” (2013)• Updating terms can obscure problems• User education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “The Case for Taxonomic Reparations” (2016)• Change the power structure• Use and create additional vocabularies

“Whereas critique exposes the fictions of universal classifications, reparative reading and creative thinking can help us to reconfigure and reassemble objects in relation to ourselves and others in ways that **heal and redistribute the wealth of knowledge** in our libraries, archives, and museums. There is no ideal form or site for reparative taxonomies. They already exist in many locations and take a variety of forms, and we have yet to invent all the possibilities for this kind of work. **Creating many reparative taxonomies** and consciously acknowledging them as such can collectively **chip away at the dominant structures that order knowledge in ways that do harm**. They can function as liberatory descriptive standards.” (p.639)

Adler, Melissa. (2016). The Case for Taxonomic Reparations. *Knowledge Organization*, 43(8): 630-640. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5771/0943-7444-2016-8-630>

Melissa Adler in her article “the case for taxonomic reparations” argues for the use of what she calls reparative taxonomies. The idea here is that libraries should use more than just the standard vocabularies like the LCSH. Libraries can add local terms and create local vocabularies. There are also vocabularies created by communities, for example there’s the Homosaurus, a vocabulary created by the Transgender Digital Archive to promote the discovery of LGBTQ+ resources. The main idea that I take away from this is that the library ends up sharing its power with its users. That is, the people who are described by the library and use the library can have a hand in deciding how they are described by the library, not just catalogers.



- Develop a service to educate library community about problems with LCSH and encourage them to submit suggested terms for catalogers to review and add to local records.
- Develop system, based on WikiBase, to create a platform to enable catalogers to add user-supplied keywords to local records, as well as add and control those keywords to a vocabulary.
- Connect vocabulary terms to other vocabularies (ex. LCSH)



- Changing power dynamic
- Practicality, user-tagging not an option
- Added value

So why would I suggest using a controlled vocabulary over another type of vocabulary?

First, my interest is in

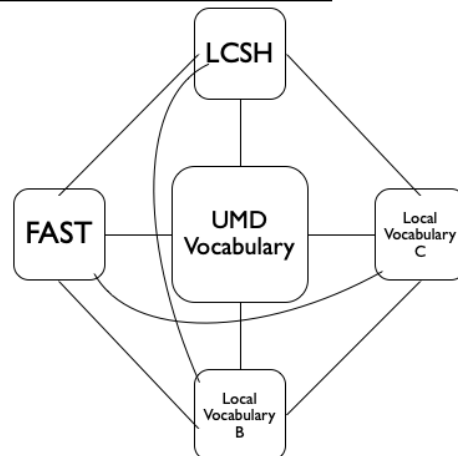
The main thing is, honestly, practicality. Features like user-tagging would be helpful, but UMD doesn't have a system that enables user tagging, but catalogers can edit records to add local terms.

Controlling a vocabulary has a lot of benefits that add value. Because folksonomies using whatever terms a user uses, their efficacy can be limited by users using different terms for the same concept. In a folksonomy, there is no hierarchy or relationships, so if people are talking about terrapins, the terms terrapin, diamondback terrapin, and malaclemys terrapin will be treated as wholly separate concepts. However if we apply some control, we can use "terrapiin" as our preferred term, the term that will be displayed, because that's the term used most at UMD, but we can include the other terms as alternative terms, so if someone happens to search for malaclemys terrapin, our system will know what they really mean (at least in the terms of our system) is "terrapiin". In addition to establishing preferred and

variant terms, we could also establish relationships, providing context for terms. And the reason I'm most interested in a controlled folksonomy, is the ability to publish the data as linked data, making



- Use WikiBase
- Look into automating relationships with other vocabularies
- Could be used by other parts of the library or even other libraries
- Potential for additional value with future library catalogs



Making a local vocabulary available as linked data also opens the opportunity to connect it to other vocabularies using relationships. This means a local vocabulary, which would normally be an isolated tool, can be a part of a web of vocabularies. While the benefit may not be immediate, it would enable future library systems that use linked data to understand

So while in the end this vocabulary could become part of a network of vocabularies, the intent is to create workflows and a supportive system that could enable other libraries and other communities to create their own vocabularies and become part of this network as well. At the end of the day, what I see as most valuable is the shift to working with our own community to help making our resources discoverable for them.