Call Us by Our Name(s)
Shifting Representations of the Transgender Community in Classificatory Practice

Abstract:
The linguistic shifts in terms used for self-representation and collective representation by the transgender community are a compelling exemplification of subject-based classification schemes’ shortcomings. These shortcomings become readily apparent in digital environments which enable user-generated tagging of content; on these platforms, members of the transgender community are able to maintain their preferred self-referential terms to establish the subject(s) of their work. In using creator-generated tags as a source for contemporary terminology to be used in subject-based classification schemes, I will build upon previous work by surveying self-referential terminology generated by creators of original works about the transgender community. By comparing the terminology used in hashtags on posts centered on the transgender community on Instagram with the terminology present in the Library of Congress’ subclass heading for HQ77.7—HQ77.95 and the Library of Congress’ available subject headings relating to gender variance, I will examine the shifts in rhetorical representation of materials focused on the transgender community over time, using this as justification for additional documentation regarding global changes made to classification schemes and indexing languages into online catalog records.

1.0 Introduction
The Library of Congress Classification Scheme is the bibliographic classification scheme developed by the Library of Congress. Its primary sites of implementation are libraries within the United States of America, and it is also implemented in numerous libraries within and outside the United States (Olson 2000, 54). The flaws built into LCC have been well-documented throughout the 20th century—particularly as these flaws relate to the scheme’s representation of marginalized communities (Adler 2017, 9-10, 44; Fox 2016, 375; Olson 2000, 54; Olson 2001, 541). The transgender community is one of many groups that has been represented within LCC by terminology which is perceived by the community as outdated and pejorative (Roberto 2011, 57). LCC subclass HQ77.7—HQ77.95 is where materials about the transgender community are classified using the term “transsexualism,” which is considered to be an outdated—and often offensive—term by many transgender individuals.

The terms used to name LCC classes and subclasses are meant to reflect the language used by relevant discourse communities; however, despite terminological shifts within queer studies and other fields, which have been catalyzed by the transgender community’s increased political and cultural visibility, “transsexualism” continues to be a term used within LCC. I argue that the HQ77.7—HQ77.95 subclass heading is no longer reflective of the terminology used by transgender individuals during acts of self-representation, using hashtags on Instagram as a way to measure the prevalence of particular terminology within the LGBTQ community when creating and sharing content by and about transgender individuals. I also argue for the addition of version control in public-facing catalog records as a means for documenting large-scale edits made to knowledge organization infrastructures, so as to increase transparency and facilitate institutional accountability in classificatory and cataloguing practices.
2.0 Literature Review

When creating a bibliographic classification scheme—particularly those which use a hierarchical structure—one must establish different concepts’ relations to each other (Tennis 2012, 1351), and also the terminology used to name concepts and subjects. It is understood that language is always imperfect and constantly evolving, and this is true in classificatory practices as it is in other contexts (Ranganathan 1937, 62; Tennis 2016, 574). Despite this acknowledged fluidity, which is a natural result of knowledge production, authors of classification schemes are put in a position where they must choose stable terms according to common usage (Adler 2017, 34; Roberto 2016, 63). In the implementation of a classification scheme, there must also be a way for terms to systematically be updated to reflect changes in common usage (Fox 2016, 380; Olson 2001, 660-661; Ranganathan 1937, 64). Changes to classification schemes and indexing languages are unavoidable as knowledge is constantly produced, and these changes may be based upon literary warrant and/or ethical reasons (Tennis 2013, 2). This process of addition and revision broadly prevents the catalog from becoming obsolete (Ranganathan 1937, 66). Further, periodic revisions to classification schemes and indexing languages can and should prevent the continued use of terminology which is harmful to marginalized communities (Roberto 2016, 63).

Literary warrant is a key concept in consideration of how terms are chosen in classification schemes; it is the idea that relevant literature should be surveyed with attention given to the language used to describe phenomena within a given knowledge domain, so that the terminology reflects the established discourse within that domain (Johnson 2010, 662). Literary warrant may be a useful way of choosing a particular term, as it is intended to enforce the language used within a community of experts (Adler 2009, 313; 2017, 20; Olson 2000, 56); however, the enforcement of literary warrant in practice often undermines its conceptual usefulness, as inconsistent application of this concept may also justify the use of outdated or derogatory terminology (Olson 2000, 57-58, 65).

The HQ section of the Library of Congress classification scheme is a space which has been subjected to scrutiny by a number of scholars and researchers within the field of knowledge organization (Adler 2015, 489; Johnson 2010, 663). Materials about the LGBTQ community—as well as about sexual deviations, sadism, masochism, and fetishism—are catalogued in the HQ70s, with materials about “transsexualism” residing in HQ77.7—77.95 (Library of Congress, n.d.). According to the application of literary warrant within this subclass of LCC, “transsexualism” is a valid term based upon literary warrant from early 20th century medical and psychiatric literature, in which the term appears frequently when referring to gender-variant individuals (Adler 2009, 668; 2017, 36; Johnson 2010, 668). However, contemporary discourse communities use other terminology to describe individuals who do not identify and/or present as their birth-assigned gender; most notably, these discourse communities include the transgender community, who are shaping the ways in which gender variance is named by creating and disseminating their works in both analog and digital media.

‘Transgender’ as a broad term used to describe individuals who transgress traditionally-codified notions of gender may be attributed to Leslie Feinberg, a prominent transgender author and activist (Adler 2009, 318-319); the term was initially introduced by Virginia Price in the 1980s to describe individuals who do not present as their birth-assigned gender yet do not seek to medically transition (Johnson 2010, 666). Today,
“transgender” is a preferred term to “transsexual” by most members of the transgender community; this preference is validated in common speech as well as in textual works in many disciplines and authoritative entities. While “transgender people” was introduced into LCSH in 2007 (Library of Congress 2019a), “transsexualism” remains the term used in LCC to describe this community.

3.0 Method

Past work which focuses on the terminology used to describe materials about the transgender community has engaged with terminological disparity between LCC/LCSH and discursive practices within the LGBTQ community. Melissa Adler’s study of the disparities between LCC/LCSH and user-generated tags in platforms which are intended for use with book recommendations is a notable example of research focused on how the transgender community is named in different formal and informal environments; the users of these platforms are readers and reviewers of the books which are given tags to facilitate retrieval (Adler 2009, 320). Adler’s study shows the disparities between terminology used in LCC/LCSH and terminology used by readers who engage with materials by and about the transgender community.

To build upon Adler’s work, I have focused on terminology used by the creators of materials about the transgender community on Instagram. As a social media platform, Instagram is used primarily for disseminating images or short-form text. To facilitate content retrieval, creators affix hashtags to their post; there is no controlled vocabulary imposed upon hashtags, meaning that creators may use whatever terms they wish in hashtags, but creators also have an interest in applying hashtags which are common-usage terms if their intention is for their post to be seen by a wide range of individuals. Instagram was chosen for this work because of the importance that social media platforms and other digital environments have for the LGBTQ community; these digital environments are relied upon by the LGBTQ community for sharing not only creative works, but relevant information pertaining to legislation, politics, and medical care.

Instagram enables a user to search for a term as a hashtag, and these searches return all of the posts upon which this term is affixed as a hashtag as well as the total number of posts on the platform which bear the hashtag. Beginning on October 8, 2019, eleven terms were entered as searches for hashtags. These eleven terms were chosen based upon the terminology used in LCC/LCSH as well as upon the derivations of Library of Congress terminology which are used upon this platform. “Transsexualism” is the term used to name HQ77.7—77.95, and “transgenderpeople” and “transsexuals” are terms used in LCSH (Library of Congress n.d.; 2017; 2019a). “Transgender” and “trans” were chosen based upon common usage among the transgender community in published works as well as in spoken discourse; “transsexual” was chosen to maintain continuity in studied terms’ forms. To account for terminological disparity within LCSH, which has subject headings for “female-to-male transsexuals,” “male-to-female transsexuals,” “transgender men,” and “transgender women,” (Library of Congress 2018a; 2018b; 2019b; 2019c) qualifications regarding the gender binary were affixed to “trans,” “transgender,” and “transsexual” as search terms. The respective quantities of posts returned on October 8, 2019, with each of these hashtags were recorded as the initial quantities; the same eleven terms were searched as hashtags on February 5, 2020, so as to assess the relative frequency of use of each respective term.
4.0 Findings

The number of posts bearing “trans” or “transgender” as hashtags at the beginning of the data collection process was at least double the quantity of the number of posts bearing “transsexual” or some derivation thereof; this was seen to be the case regardless of whether or not these terms were qualified by some directional acknowledgement of the gender binary. Further, the frequency at which posts were tagged with “trans” or “transgender” was higher than that of posts tagged with “transsexual.” This was seen not only in all three of these terms in their singular and plural forms, but also in derivations of these terms which included directional acknowledgement of the gender binary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Searched Terms</th>
<th>Number of Posts, Oct. 8, 2019</th>
<th>Number of Posts, Feb. 5, 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>femaletomaletrans</td>
<td>5,442</td>
<td>5,788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>femaletomaletransgender</td>
<td>18,159</td>
<td>19,043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>femaletomaletranssexual</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maletofemaletrans</td>
<td>3,332</td>
<td>3,565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maletofemaletransgender</td>
<td>6,810</td>
<td>7,849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maletofemaletranssexual</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trans</td>
<td>7,053,350</td>
<td>7,441,758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transgender</td>
<td>8,965,528</td>
<td>9,315,772</td>
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<td>1,975</td>
<td>1,999</td>
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<td>transsexual</td>
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<td>605,412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transsexualism</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transsexuals</td>
<td>28,942</td>
<td>30,267</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Eleven terms searched as hashtags on Instagram, accompanied by each term’s respective quantities of tagged posts.

It is particularly notable that, over the course of data collection, the only terms which showed no increase in posts using them as hashtags were “femaletomaletranssexual,” and “maletofemaletranssexual,” and that only five posts were tagged with “transsexualism” over the course of seventeen weeks. Considering that these terms were chosen due to their presence in LCSH as subject heading terms and as a subclass heading in LCC, this should be particularly noteworthy.

5.0 Discussion

As seen in the collected data, “transsexualism” and derivations thereof is a term which is used far less frequently than “trans” or “transgender” to signify posts about gender variance on a popular social media platform for purposes of retrieval by platform users. This extension of literary warrant to include self-representative discursive practices in digital environments calls into question the continued use of “transsexualism” as the term used to name HQ77.7—77.95.

A bibliographic classification scheme’s implementation necessarily affects the ways in which patrons access materials and interpret materials (Adler 2017, 5; Tennis 2012, 1355). By maintaining “transsexualism” as a subclass heading, despite the ongoing work
of the transgender community, the broader LGBTQ community, and activist librarians to shift LCC/LCSH terminology, these organizational infrastructures are enabling a particular interpretation of works about the transgender community (Tennis 2012, 1355). This interpretation prioritizes early 20th century medical and psychiatric discourse over the transgender community’s self-representational discourse, with the effect of marginalizing the latter (Adler 2017, 34; Olson 2000; 55, 68-9). Further, this maintenance of an outdated, non-preferred term as a subclass heading may be detrimental to patrons who are using preferred terminology when attempting to access materials about this community (Roberto 2011, 63). Based upon the discursive practices of the transgender community, the Library of Congress must address their reliance on what the majority of the described community perceives to be an inaccurate term

The relative speed of terminological shift from ‘transsexual’ to ‘transgender’ as a preferred term for the transgender community is made manifest in LCC, in which a once-common term’s presence is now perceived as a problem. This is a particularly interesting example of term shift, as ‘transsexual’ and ‘transsexualism’ are terms which have a history of being used not only by doctors, psychiatrists, and researchers, but also self-referentially by many gender variant individuals in printed works and spoken language alike. When one considers the pace at which the transgender community began to adopt the term ‘transgender’ self-referentially; the fact that ‘transsexual’ is not universally perceived as a pejorative term by gender variant individuals, as the collected data shows that it is still a used term (albeit with less frequency than “trans” or “transgender”); and the increasing use of the term “trans”, a truncation of transsexual and transgender, within the community; the implication is that this community may continue to engage in ongoing self-referential terminological shift. LCC’s inability to adequately express this shift can—and should—be understood as a vestige of antiquated notions of gender and gender variance (Roberto 2011, 57). This example also can be understood as an example of the problems which may be caused by a universal classification scheme which is so firmly fixed that it cannot accommodate for new knowledge or conceptual shifts (Olson 2000, 57; Tennis 2016, 574).

The findings in this study are consistent with those of other knowledge organization researchers who have lent their academic focus to terminological stagnancy and contentious terms’ presence in LCC/LCSH (Drabinski 2013, 98; Fox 2016, 375; Olson 2000, 74; 2001, 647), particularly with regards to terminology used to describe the LGBTQ community (Adler 2015, 491; 2017, 324; Roberto 2011, 63). Future research concerning the continued use of obsolete and demeaning terminology within LCC and other classification schemes must continue, as the findings of researchers often bolster the lived experiences of individuals outside of academia and may act as justification for broader structural changes to be made to LCC and other classification schemes. This future research must not focus solely on justification for updating specific terminology. While changing a given term may be a welcome short-term solution, updating terms on a one-to-one basis will not solve a host of broader concerns that this particular study illuminates.
6.0 Reducing Opacity in LCC/LCSH

At this time, any modifications made to catalog records which represent global changes to LCC/LCSH are not made visible to patrons, who only see the finalized catalog record. A valuable addition to public-facing library catalog records would be additional documentation regarding global changes to LCC/LCSH as they affect these records. Rather than making changes relating to terminology and erasing all traces of former terminology, it would be useful to maintain a visible history of these changes on the records themselves, so as to convey the history of modifications made to this classification scheme and indexing language. The addition of version control would also be copacetic with LCSH itself, which includes subject headings’ edit history in its entries.

LCC and LCSH are information infrastructures which are fixed in the context during which they were created and modified; they are also representations of this institution’s perspective on concepts, topics, and subjects at that point in time. This is unavoidable, as it is not possible for cataloguers to ever truly be neutral (Drabinski 2013, 95; Olson 2000, 64; Roberto 2011, 62), nor is it possible for cataloguers to predict the future directions of knowledge production, self-representational practices, and so on. Version controlling public-facing library catalog records would provide support for navigating the retrieval-related issues caused by terminological shift, as this would convey both outdated and updated terminology while prioritizing the latter (Tennis 2012, 574). Identities and the terms used to express them are multifaceted and constantly changing—both at an individual level and at collective levels—and knowledge is constantly being produced, yet LCC/LCSH maintain their fixity without acknowledging the temporal nature of the materials over which they exert control (Tennis 2012; Olson 2000, 57; Roberto 2011, 60). If the ways in which these changes affect classification schemes and indexing languages were documented and made accessible, users would still be able to rely upon familiar (if outdated) terminology while being encouraged to adopt terminology which is more current.

When considering how to reduce the harm perpetuated by LCC/LCSH’s antiquated notions of gender identity and sexual orientation, Emily Drabinski advocates for the maintenance of these infrastructures, along with increased interactions in which librarians use these existing infrastructures as a way to teach patrons about institutional control over non-normative ways of being (Drabinski 2013, 108-109). The assumption made is that patrons will notice the workings of LCC/LCSH and ask librarians about them, and that librarians will be equipped to answer their questions, which cannot be guaranteed on any scale; more importantly, this suggestion enables the continued use of infrastructures which have been revealed to be harmful in numerous capacities. By documenting large-scale changes to LCC/LCSH in item records, Drabinski’s idea of using LCC/LCSH as tools for studying institutional representations of identities and communities would still be possible, but in a way that still encourages large-scale modifications of these infrastructures. These traces of oppressive and harmful practices would be usable as a tool for having instructional conversations about how institutions exact power in what are currently ‘invisible’ ways without maintaining these infrastructures in ways that perpetuate harm.

Numerous scholars have called for increased transparency in the acknowledgement of terminological shifts and other changes made to classification schemes and indexing
language (Olson 2000, 68; Tennis 2013, 6; 2012, 1352; Roberto 2011, 63). Adding public-facing version control to item records in a library catalog would, quite literally, convey these global changes to users in this and other contexts. The assumption here, though, is that there will be global changes to document; put another way, the usefulness of version control in library catalogs’ item records is contingent on the Library of Congress’ willingness to make global changes justified by literary warrant and/or demanded by the communities being named.

At this time, LCC/LCSH are exerting control over how users seek and retrieve materials, but in a way which is largely invisible to the average user (Drabinski 2013, 97; Olson 2000, 66). Increased transparency about how these infrastructures are exerting that control—in ways which are both beneficial and detrimental—would be a way for users to better understand how these infrastructures are shaping their efforts to find information. The addition of this documentation to public-facing library catalog records would thus be a mechanism for institutional accountability, as version controlled records would indicate reparative practices and harmful practices alike. LCC/LCSH have been widely criticized for their damaging treatment of the LGBTQ community and other already-marginalized communities by researchers and librarians over the course of the 20th century; transparency about the continuation of harmful practices may encourage the institution to actually implement the reparative changes which have been repeatedly demanded. That being said, changes have been made to LCC/LCSH which do reduce the harm caused by problematic terminology and other practices (Olson 2000, 60), and version controlled item records would convey these positive changes to users as well.

The well-intentioned goal of LCC/LCSH are to facilitate browsing and retrieval of relevant materials, but the frequency with which these infrastructures are shown to fall short of this goal necessitates a closer look at the tools used for this purpose (Tennis 2016, 578). These tools include the terms used to name classes and subjects, but also the catalogs themselves. Future research may focus on the logistics of exploiting digital environments’ capabilities for enabling the addition of version control to library catalog records on a global scale, so as to reduce the burden that additional documentation could place upon cataloguers, librarians, and other relevant information professionals.

The addition of version control to library catalogs’ public-facing item records would surely be beneficial to the transgender community and other communities which have been poorly represented by LCC/LCSH, but would also be beneficial to any subject represented within a universal classification scheme; knowledge is constantly changing within disciplines, and any work which seeks to increase a classification scheme’s flexibility and ability to accommodate these changes is sure to benefit users across disciplines. That being said, the addition of version control to catalog records will not, by itself, solve problems such as terminological stagnancy and continued use of derogatory language. This documentation will convey this institution’s shifts in perspective on the bibliographic universe and enable transparency and accountability on an institutional level; it will provide support to users within and outside academia who are using these catalogs, and will hopefully facilitate future work which will substantially reduce the maintenance of oppressive practices in information infrastructures.
7.0 Conclusion
The evolution of self-representative terminology used by the transgender community, which may be seen in not only published works but in discursive practices in digital environments, has not been adequately reflected in the Library of Congress Classification Scheme, which still uses the outdated term “transsexualism” to name the subclass within which works about this community are classified; this community is only slightly better represented in Library of Congress Subject Headings. This disparity in terminology conveys previously-voiced concerns about the continued use of outdated, perjorative terminology in LCC/LCSH; it also shows the greater shortcomings of knowledge organization infrastructures which are so fixed that they cannot accommodate for terminological shift based upon the development of new knowledge. The addition of public-facing documentation of global changes to these infrastructures to catalog records may ameliorate these concerns, as this documentation would convey changes in representations of subjects; it would also act as a mechanism for institutional accountability to its patrons, particularly those who have called for changes to be made to these infrastructures.

References

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