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### Metadata for Diversity: Identification and Implications of Potential Access Points for Diverse Library Resources

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# Metadata for Diversity: Identification and Implications of Potential Access Points for Diverse Library Resources

## *Purpose*

The purpose of this paper is to investigate what metadata elements for access points currently exist to represent diverse library reading materials, either in libraries or from external sources, as well as what metadata elements for access points are currently not present but are necessary to represent diverse library reading materials.

## *Design/methodology/approach*

A field scan of thirteen contemporary metadata schemas identified elements that might serve as potential access points regarding the diversity status of resource creators as well as topical or thematic content. Elements were semantically mapped using a metadata crosswalk to understand the intellectual and conceptual space of the elements. Element definitions and application of controlled vocabularies were also examined where possible to offer additional context.

## *Findings*

Metadata elements describing gender, occupation, geographic region, audience, and age currently exist in many schemas and could potentially be used to offer access to diverse library materials. However, metadata elements necessary to represent racial, ethnic, national and cultural identity are currently not present in specific forms necessary for enabling resource access and collection assessment. Lack of distinct elements contributes to the implicit erasure of marginalized identities.

## *Originality/value*

The search for metadata describing diversity is a first step towards enabling more systematic access to diverse library materials. The need for systematic description of diversity to make visible and promote diverse materials is highlighted in this paper. Though the subject of this article is library organization systems and for clarity uses terms specific to the library profession, the issues present are relevant to all information professionals and knowledge organization systems.

## **Introduction**

Diversity is a core value of American librarianship, with a specific call for librarians to provide access to library resources for diverse communities and from diverse populations (American Library Association, 2004). People from traditionally marginalized communities in the United States, including women and people of non-traditional genders, people of color, indigenous peoples, people identifying as LGBTQIA+, and people with disabilities, need access to books and other library resources about or created by people like themselves to see their identities, stories, and experiences reflected in contemporary media, and feel empowered to create new works. Traditionally mainstream

communities also benefit from exposure to media about and by diverse people to learn alternative perspectives and empathy. As bastions of reading and literacy, American libraries are uniquely positioned to support these benefits by providing access to and promoting diverse books and other bibliographic resources.

In recent years, librarians and library workers have drawn on various techniques to achieve this goal. Although the number of published bibliographic materials in the U.S. by and about diverse peoples is disproportionately small, strategies to provide access to and promotion of these resources are emerging. Most attempts take the form of booklists or bibliographies, or promotional events and programming. Library workers also draw on traditional library services such as book-talking, collection development, readers' advisory, and displays of physical materials in the library. Although laudable in helping to connect readers to diverse materials, these approaches face limitations. The majority of these examples rely on an individual person or organization to curate a list or collection of resources, or offer recommendations tailored to an individual reader. These approaches are often ad-hoc, unsystematic, and not scalable, and can create a kind of "filter bubble" where people who might benefit from reading diverse resources do not realize those resources exist. Yet libraries rely on these curatorial, self-selecting strategies because no universal or systematic tool that surfaces diverse resources currently exists.

How can libraries move beyond the artisanal, curation-based approaches to promoting diverse media to encourage a wider readership of both diverse and mainstream audiences? The development of more systematic, scalable tools relies on descriptive metadata not currently required by traditional library cataloging standards and objectives. This paper aims to investigate existing metadata describing diversity as means for wider, more systematic approaches to promoting diverse reading materials (including both fiction and non-fiction) in libraries, furthering encouragement of and advocacy for diverse reading and media consumption, especially by those people who might not otherwise be self-inclined to pursue such resources. To ultimately support these objectives, this research seeks to answer to the following research questions:

- What metadata elements for access points currently exist to represent diverse library reading materials, either in libraries or from external sources?
- What metadata elements for access points are currently not present, but are necessary to represent diverse library reading materials?

## Literature Review

### *Benefits of access to diverse materials*

Librarians and other educators have long advocated for diverse literature and reading. Bishop (1990) established the ubiquitous metaphor of "windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors" to describe reading experiences: windows that offer views and insights into new worlds, doors that let readers become part of those worlds, and mirrors that reflect our own lives as part of the larger human experience. Bishop therefore describes reading

as affording self-affirmation, wherein readers validate their own experiences and existence through books. Conversely, she notes, books can also invalidate some readers' existences "when they cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable." Aronson et al. (2017) look more deeply into Bishop's mirrors by examining the messages conveyed in picture books to underrepresented racial and cultural groups, asking not only who is represented but how. The themes and messages identified "illuminate the need not just for more titles portraying underrepresented groups but also for a variety of types of portrayals, each with different messages and impact." Adiche (2009) warns us about "the danger of the single story," or the creation of stereotypes and incomplete understanding of others that stems from a lack of exposure to and intake of multiple materials from other groups. Not only can offering access to reading materials representing a broader range of diversity serve as an indicator of validity and value of traditionally marginalized groups, it prevents such groups from inadvertently being stereotyped or even rendered invisible to the general reader.

In addition to self-affirmation and self-validation for a broader audience, diverse reading materials can also validate the existence of others through empathy. Lawson (2013) and Sherr and Beise (2015) have demonstrated how literature can contribute to and improve empathy in high school and undergraduate education, respectively. Bollenbach (2014) encourages teachers to read children's literature about students with challenges such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and Asperger's Syndrome to understand "what it is like to be in their shoes and what is going on in their heads." Bouley & Godfrey (2008) discuss examples of how diverse children's literature allows college students to connect their experiences to those of others, creating a basis for empathy. They show how this empathy is then used to help college students understand and address issues of oppression and social justice. Etling (2015) found that elementary educators used children's literature to help students make connections, share familiar experiences and explore unfamiliar ones, and that among other tactics, educators used unfamiliar literature to expose students to new situations and delicate topics that may be unfamiliar to them. López-Robertson (2017) shows how engagement with multicultural literature increases children's awareness of others. Although much of the research on empathy via reading is centered on children, adults also benefit similarly. Adult literary fiction has been shown to facilitate the understanding of others who are different from ourselves and augment people's capacity for empathy (Mar and Oatley, 2008). Kaufman and Libby (2012) show that reading about empathetic characters in narrative fiction can reduce explicit prejudice. Building on their work, Johnson et al. (2013) found that the power of narrative fiction to elicit empathy not only can reduce explicit prejudice, but also implicit bias. They also found a reduction in categorical race bias and the inclination to make stereotypical race-based judgments (Johnson et al., 2014). Davis (2008) offers evidence that white adult readers' identification with black characters in literature inspired critical self-reflection regarding white privilege, demonstrating that empathetic reading of literature from races other than one's own can radically destabilize preconceived notions and foster the development of anti-racist political sensibilities.

### *Current methods of providing access to diverse materials*

Given these established benefits of diverse reading materials, the expectation is increased accessibility to such materials. However, although great headway has been made in this space in recent years, several barriers to increased access exist. First, despite the benefits to be gained from reading diverse literature, there is a lack of diverse reading material available for readers to consume. As early as 1985, the Cooperative Children's Book Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison began tracking statistics about the annual publication of children's books by and about people of color in the U.S. Out of 3,400 children's books published in 2016, only about 22% were about people of color and/or first/native nations, and only 13% written by people of those same backgrounds. These low proportions of diverse reading materials have remained constant for over 20 years [I]. Many reasons are proffered for this discrepancy, from funding cuts in libraries to publishers' fear of low sales. However, the lack of publishing diverse books based on the belief that they are not lucrative becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Low, 2013a). The issue extends beyond publishing. An analysis of top-selling children's literature textbooks used for teacher education programs found that LGBT topics were underrepresented, sometimes to the point of non-inclusion, rendering such literature, and by extension such people, invisible (Smolkin and Young, 2011). Although much of the quantitative data about diverse materials is focused on children's books, young adult (YA) and adult literature have also been criticized (Kelly 2013; Low 2013c). Other forms of media often found in library collections, like television shows and movies, are not immune (Low, 2013b; Low, 2014). Such disproportionate imbalances mean even if offered a large pool of resources from which to select, few of the options would reflect diverse perspectives, thus contributing to the devaluing of minority identities and reifying majority reading materials as the norm.

In recognition of this issue, librarians and other educators have begun to advocate for increased availability and access to diverse reading materials. However, providing such access can prove difficult. In addition to the publication imbalance, diverse books may be difficult for patrons to identify. A lack of knowledge about children's literature was found to be a significant obstacle to educators when selecting student readings (Cremin et al., 2008). Recently, a variety of attempts to connect readers with the disproportionately small numbers of diverse books have emerged to bridge such gaps. Many of these take the form of booklists or bibliographies published in popular media. Additional tactics include promotional events, such as the "Reading Without Walls" Project, which challenges young people to explore worlds outside their comfort zone by reading (Library of Congress, 2017a). Others have been more grassroots, such as the #WeNeedDiverseBooks campaign, which began as a crowdsourced effort in 2014 to increase publishing and consumption of diverse children's books [II]. Their approaches range from trending Twitter hashtags to conference and events. In 2017, We Need Diverse Books launched their first app, called "Our Story," offering searchable collections of diverse books. Similar tools from other sources, like the Diversity in YA website and the "We Read Too" app offer reviews and searchable lists for diverse reading materials. Diverse BookFinder, a tool developed by an interdisciplinary team at Bates College offers a collection of picture books featuring people of color and indigenous

peoples, placing particular emphasis on story type—not only who is represented but how they are represented (Aronson et al., 2018).

Librarians and library workers also draw on their professional knowledge and background to provide access to and promote diverse library materials. These typically take the form of traditional library services such as recommended reading lists, readers’ advisory, and displays or exhibits of physical materials in the library. *School Library Journal* (n.d.) provides a number of lists to guide diverse collection development. The Association for Library Services to Children recommends developing culturally-responsive library programming, including access to and promotion of diverse books beyond the stereotypical specialties like holidays and history months (Naidoo, 2014). Other suggestions to librarians for promoting diverse books include book-talking, revising suggested reading lists to include more diverse books, publicizing books that have won diversity awards, borrowing diverse books from other libraries to supplement the collection, and creating exhibits emphasizing diverse reading materials (Killeen, 2015). Some libraries use tactics such as developing LibGuides that focus on diverse literature to help patrons with book suggestions (see Figure 1 for an example). The Adult Reading Round Table, a group of Chicago-based librarians, crafts a Popular Fiction list, a self-evaluative training tool testing RA knowledge. It is incorporated in the readers’ advisory database NoveList and includes sections for “special reading interests” and “international authors,” both of which feature diverse materials (Spratford, 2015). Hollands (2017) discusses the provision of diverse reading materials as an intrinsic part of readers’ advisory service, arguing for the integration of diverse resources into “regular” reading via readers’ advisory suggestions.

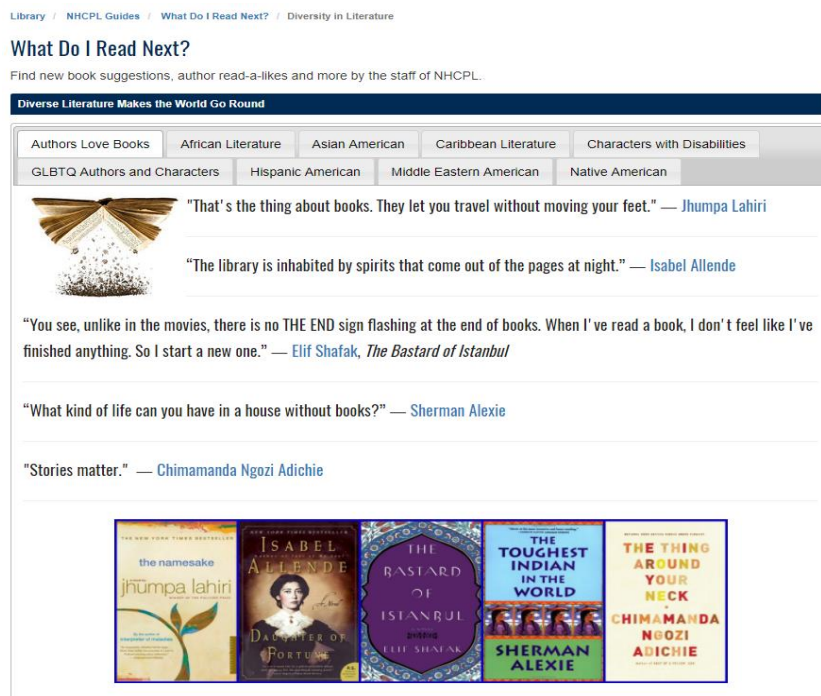


Figure 1. Screenshot of a LibGuide form the New Hanover County (NC) Public Library offering diverse reading recommendations. <http://libguides.nhclibrary.org/c.php?g=10280&p=2410018>

All of these approaches—of which there are more examples than can be presented here—should be lauded as an important step in helping to connect library patrons with diverse reading materials. However, these approaches face some significant limitations. One major issue is that the majority of these examples are curatorial, in the sense that an individual person or organization curates a list or collection of resources, or offers recommendations tailored to an individual reader. This approach is often ad-hoc, not systematic, and more importantly, not scalable. As each list or suggestion is created locally, it lives in a local silo. Even if posted online or shared in other ways, they do not become integrated with other lists or recommendations in a systematic way. Additionally, reading lists require readers to opt-in: for almost all of these approaches, readers must already be interested in and willing to seek out resources pointing them to diverse materials, or the materials themselves. Such self-selection can create a kind of “filter bubble” where people who might benefit from reading diverse resources do not realize those resources exist, thus reifying the erasure of minority and marginalized groups.

### *Metadata for diversity*

Libraries rely on these curatorial, self-selecting strategies because there is currently not a more universal or systematic tool that surfaces diverse resources. Current library catalogs and discovery layers return search results according to “relevance”—a mysterious black-box algorithm that often results in befuddlement (Reidsma, 2016). Users can often choose options for reordering search results (such as chronology) or narrow their results using filters (such as format). However, despite recent interest in supporting diversity in books and reading, there is no current integrated library system or catalog that surfaces diverse resources. Diversity book tools like We Need Diverse Books’ Our Story and Diverse BookFinder, while important and powerful tools for highlighting and promoting diverse books, are not universal—they are separate databases representing small collections with specific scopes and not currently indexed in library discovery tools. The implications of this are multi-fold and affect patrons who may be interested in accessing diverse materials and library staff who may wish to collect data to understand and assess the diversity of their collections. Additionally, disallowing such access not only renders these tasks impossible, but also invisible, inadvertently conveying the message that such queries are unimportant and unnecessary.

Why don’t more systematic tools exist? One major reason is that library catalog records do not include metadata that describe aspects of diversity. Searching or filtering for books and other library resources based on criteria reflecting diversity can only occur if those criteria are included as metadata. While the number of data elements included in bibliographic description has increased over time, access points—data elements that offer a point of entry to a collection and a means to collocate similar materials (Reitz, 2014)—have changed little since Cutter’s articulation of finding materials by title, author, and subject as the main objectives of library catalogs (Clarke, 2015). Bibliographic records were originally intended to provide all necessary information to describe a library resource both physically and intellectually to distinguish it from every other library item and to provide a location from the item in the collection (Wynar, 1980). Information describing creators of library resources was typically not included in bibliographic records. Instead, this information is traditionally recorded in authority records, the main

purpose of which is to maintain consistency of verbal forms of creator's names and document relationships between forms of names (Taylor and Joudry, 2009, p. 249). Other goals of authority control include identification of and disambiguation among various creators with similar names or labels, and collocation of resources by the same creators or on the same topics even when different labels are used to describe them (p. 250). Given this focus on identification, disambiguation and collocation rather than access, it is not surprising that authority control has been neglected when compared with the creation of descriptive bibliographic data (Petrucciani, 2004, p. 137). Fully describing the physical, intellectual, or other character of the creator of a resource—including their status as regards diversity—was never the intention nor the purview of authority data. Therefore, data regarding gender, ethnicity, sexuality, or other diversity-related characteristics is traditionally only recorded if it serves to disambiguate one creator from another, rather than acting as an access point.

However, recent developments have influenced changes to this traditional approach. One major development is the idea of the semantic web, the purpose of which is to “bring structure to the meaningful content of web pages, creating an environment where software agents roaming from page to page can readily carry out sophisticated tasks for users,” such as more precise and automated searching (Berners-Lee et al., 2001). Semantic Web technologies also offer more openly accessible and interoperable metadata, allowing data from non-library systems to be integrated into library systems, and vice versa (Bermès, 2013, p. 118). Another major shift is the evolution of library cataloging rules and guidelines. Resource Description and Access (RDA) was developed with an eye toward such data-sharing models, and thus includes more affordances and opportunities for recording data. For instance, unlike previous cataloging rules, RDA allows for the recording of data such as profession/field of work and gender when describing a person (Dobreski and Kwasnik, 2017). Dobreski and Kwasnik (2017) note that such additions shift authority records away from their previous focus on names and/or headings to representing “more complete identities” (p. 11). However, these recent additions have not escaped criticism. For instance, Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto (2014) criticize the inclusion of gender metadata in authority records, noting that the Library of Congress Name Authority Cooperative Program (NACO) limits catalogers to three distinct values: *male*, *female*, or *not known*, thus preventing the ability to describe creators with any additional gender descriptions, or to account for fluidity of gender over time. Additionally, they argue that the marginalization caused by recording gender and other difficult elements such as ethnicity outweighs any retrieval or disambiguation functions, claiming that use of gender for a retrieval access point is not an objective of library cataloging (p. 420). Lee (2018) proposes a similar position regarding all author information, arguing that potential consequences outweigh access benefits.

However, lack of descriptive information about diversity is not a perfect solution. Many scholars have studied the ways in which a lack of descriptive metadata works to other or elide people and cultures. For example, Bowker and Star's (1999) seminal work demonstrates how certain people and categories can be rendered invisible in classification systems through lack of available categories. Adler (2017) shows how the Library of Congress fails to account for gender, sexual, ethnic, and racial difference via the lack of



appropriate headings and classes in its controlled vocabularies. Olson (2002) shows how Library of Congress subject representation omits women, ethnic groups, and non-western religions. She argues for techniques to breach the limits of universal languages by raising the profile of synonyms in authoritative headings and by implementing local, “eccentric” cataloging. The integration of folksonomies into some library catalogs offers some means of quick responses to shifts in categories. Srinivasan, et al. (2009) offers a theoretical framework for museum online collections (also emphasizing the framework’s relevance to other KO systems) to rethink universal classification by incorporating Web 2.0 technologies such as social computing to represent multiple and conflicting perspectives. Adler (2009) shows that folksonomies offer a multiplicity of representation of transgender books. While access to materials by subject and using folksonomies can certainly offer ways to promote diversity, they offer only one entrance to vast demographic diversities.

There is clearly a large and wide body of scholarship analyzing the problematic ways in which subject vocabularies (both controlled and uncontrolled) pertaining to minority people and cultures are constructed and how these representations impede access to diverse materials. However, these analyses focus almost exclusively on descriptive metadata values intended for application to metadata elements, such as subject or genre. Instead, we investigate elements specifically intended to function as access points for materials by and about people from traditionally marginalized communities in the United States. Though the subject of this article is library organization systems and for clarity uses terms specific to the library profession, the issues present are relevant to all information professionals and knowledge organization systems.

## Methods

The first step toward more systematic access to diverse library resources is to understand what descriptive metadata is necessary to enable access points for such fiction and non-fiction reading materials. To investigate this question, we conducted a field scan of contemporary metadata schemas—“machine-processable specification[s] that define the structure, encoding syntax, rules, and formats for a metadata element set in a formal schema language” (Zeng and Qin, 2016)-- to determine what, if any, metadata exists to represent diverse library reading materials, and what metadata elements may be necessary but currently not present. Thirteen metadata schemas were purposefully selected for review based on scope and objectives. We began with metadata schemas standard in library cataloging, such as the Machine Readable Cataloging (MARC) encoding standard and the Resource Description and Access (RDA) element set, to investigate existing metadata for diverse library resources. We also reviewed schemas used to describe bibliographic materials outside of libraries, as descriptive practices in these contexts might be used as inspiration and guidance. Schemas were purposefully selected based on scope and objectives; schemas that intentionally aimed to describe diverse materials, both inside and outside of libraries, were chosen for review. For wider comparison, several standard library schemas and general schemas intended for broad use and application, such as Dublin Core and schema.org, were included. See Table 1 for a list of schemas included in the field scan and the rationale for their inclusion.

[Table 1 INSERTED HERE]

For each schema, we identified metadata elements that might be used as potential access points regarding the diversity status of resource creators as well as topical or thematic content. A metadata element is a “formally defined term used to describe one of the properties of a resource” (Zeng and Qin 2016) or to describe a characteristic of a creator. Metadata elements, their definitions, and specifications were collected directly from source documentation and applied settings of use. When necessary, we spoke with representatives from organizations implementing some of these schemas to clarify or collect additional information, such as Krista Aronson from Diverse BookFinder and representatives from the Poetry Foundation. To better understand existing elements and identify missing elements or gaps, we organized the elements into a schema crosswalk. Bountouri and Gergatsoulis (2009) define a crosswalk as “the *semantic mapping* of the elements of a source metadata schema to the elements of a target metadata schema, in order to semantically translate the description of sources between different metadata” (p. 101, emphasis original). While the main objective of metadata crosswalking is to locate material across multiple heterogeneous collections (Godby et al., 2004), here the crosswalk is not used for the practical application of facilitating system interoperability but as a method to help understand the intellectual and conceptual space. Therefore, we rely heavily on the semantic mapping aspect of crosswalking, even though practical instantiations would also include a conversion or transformation specification (St. Pierre and LaPlant, 1998).

In addition to the semantic mapping of metadata elements, we also examined, when available, data standards that defined elements and determined rules and guidelines for the application of terms, with a specific focus on the capacity to describe characteristics relevant to diversity. Although the focus of this work is not on examining metadata values, we did review values for elements when relevant in the context of specification and application. For instance, subject and genre elements are prominent across all schemas and contain potential to express diversity via specification of values such as which controlled vocabularies are suggested or required. Hence, while this study does recognize subject and genre elements across schemas as potential access points for diversity, we focus primarily on elements that more distinctly express particular components of diversity and offer the potential for more direct access to diverse materials and creators.

## Findings

After initial collection of metadata elements from each schema, it became clear that two distinct crosswalks were necessary: one to semantically map elements describing resource creators and one to map elements describing resources themselves, because library resources featuring diverse characters and themes may be written by mainstream (non-diverse) authors and vice versa. Generic descriptive text was applied to the crosswalks to map elements across schemas with the same semantic meaning and descriptive function, even though element labels in each schema varied. The crosswalks

revealed patterns that illustrate which elements are dominantly used, which are missing, and the variety of values used to populate elements.

### *Creator elements*

Table 2 shows elements across the thirteen schemas used to describe resource creators (such as authors, illustrators, and other contributors). Here, elements describing age, gender, geographic region, affiliation, and occupation were the most commonly represented across the schemas. Six schemas include an age element. Seven schemas include a gender element. Of note regarding the gender element, Poetry Foundation’s exclusively internal use of a creator’s gender ensures that a poet’s gender identity reflects their self-identification rather than being used as a means to categorize creators by gender. Four schemas include an occupation element and four include an affiliation element. Of the schemas with an affiliation element, the definitions are broad enough to allow affiliations related to diversity. For example, RDA defines the element “has affiliation” as “relates a resource to a group with which an agent is affiliated or has been affiliated through employment, membership, *cultural identity*, etc.” (RDA element set, authors’ emphasis). Four schemas include an element for creator’s geographic region.

Notable lacks in creator elements are discrete elements that describe disability, level of educational achievement, race, religion, sexuality, pronouns, honorifics, tribe-nation, and social conditions (such as socioeconomic status, family structure, incarceration, etc.). Three schemas include elements that describe nationality, race, and culture, either singularly or in combination. For example, the Queer Cartoonists Database uses an element called “ethnicity(ies)/nationality(ies).” NoveList uses one element called “author’s nationality” and another called “author’s cultural identity.” We Need Diverse Books has an element for an author/illustrator’s “racial/ethnic” identity; however, it is not currently used as an access point, since a user cannot search for books in the OurStory tool by any aspect of the author/illustrator’s identity. Social conditions encapsulate components of a creator’s identity informed by social dimensions such as socioeconomic status and diverse family structure borne of adoption, foster care, etc. Elements describing an honorific do not necessarily relate to diversity, but may allude to a creator’s gender, educational level, or occupation.

It should be noted that some of the schemas analyzed did not include any elements intended to describe creators, such as the schema underlying Diverse BookFinder, which is only designed to describe resources and explicitly excludes creator metadata. Unqualified Dublin Core, designed as a general schema to describe digital and physical resources, does not include any creator specific metadata besides creator name.

[Table 2 INSERTED HERE]

### *Resource elements*

Table 3 illustrates elements employed to describe resource content, such as subject, theme, and characters. Prominent resource elements include audience, educational level, language, geographic region, gender, and what we have deemed a “basket” element which is discussed under the subsequent heading. Seven schemas include an element for

audience (the audience for which a resource is intended) and four schemas an element for level (the educational level of a given resource). MARC Bibliographic uses an element called “target audience” that, with the addition of an indicator, can describe both educational level and intended audience. Two schemas address level and audience with separate elements, while schema.org’s audience element is defined broadly and can be populated with values describing educational level. Six schemas have a language element and three schemas have a gender element. The gender element as used to describe a resource indicates a character’s gender or the resource’s aboutness. GoodReads uses two gender elements formatted as questions in a book’s details: “Do you think there is a strong female character in this book?” and “Do you think there is a strong male character in this book?” A GoodReads user can answer these questions by clicking a radio button for “yes” or “no”.

Elements describing race, culture, and ethnicity are not prevalent across schemas. Diverse BookFinder combines culture and race in the element “race-culture” and We Need Diverse Books combines race and ethnicity in the element “racial/ethnic identity.” Disability, sexuality, tribe-nation, religion, and social conditions are also notably lacking as elements of resource description.

[Table 3 INSERTED HERE]

### *“Basket” Element*

Specific individual elements describing a resource’s relation to culture, disability, ethnicity, race, immigration and social conditions, religion, sexuality, and tribal nation are lacking across all schemas. Aspects of these diversities are captured in some schemas use of what we term a “basket” element (see Table 4). This is a repeatable element that groups many identity-specific values together, so named for grouping these disparate descriptors together in one metaphorical basket. The majority of basket elements describe a resource’s subjects and contents. For example, both NoveList and Goodreads have the “basket” element “genre.” MARC uses two “basket” elements to describe both diversity of creators and resources: the element “Creator/Contributor Characteristics” and the element “Audience Characteristics.” Both of these elements are repeatable and can be used in bibliographic or authority records, unlike creator elements such as age or gender, which are only used in authority records. While they will eventually enable users to do faceted searching by demographic characteristics, these elements have not yet been implemented in library catalogs and discovery systems (Schiff, 2019). NoveList’s basket elements “genre” and “appeal factor” primarily describe resources, but some genre categories implicitly describe creators’ race or nationality through the use of values such as “African American Fiction” or “Australian Fiction.”

Anchor Archive and GoodReads use “basket” elements as a fundamental categorization tool but they differ in element and value control. Anchor Archive uses two elements to describe and group zines: “box category” and “subject.” A user can browse zines housed in the box category “QUR Queer,” which is defined as “Zines about gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer issues, identities, politics, and experiences.” Anchor Archive uses a controlled vocabulary and defines box categories to indicate what falls within and outside

of a particular category. Conversely, values for the GoodReads “genre” element are user-generated and not always clearly defined. While users can browse genre values on GoodReads, the list includes approximately 630 terms, many of which are completely unrelated to diversity.

[Table 4 INSERTED HERE]

### *Element definitions and applications of controlled vocabularies*

Across schemas, definitions (when they exist) that explicate an element’s use and meaning vary. Some element definitions allow uncontrolled values (such as user generated tags and free text) and others enforce the use of controlled values (such as controlled vocabularies and taxonomies). For example, GoodReads “basket” element “genre” is populated by user generated tagging while MARC Bibliographic & Authority’s “basket” elements “Creator/Contributor Characteristics” and “Audience Characteristics” are populated from Library of Congress’ “Demographic Group Terms” controlled vocabulary. Schema.org and Dublin Core’s elements support a number of different subject vocabularies and also allow free text. FOAF provides element definitions that include suggestions and best practices for values. FOAF’s specification on the gender element states

like all FOAF properties, there is in general no requirement to use gender in any particular document or description. Values other than 'male' and 'female' may be used but are not enumerated here. FOAF does not treat gender as a *static* property; the same individual may have different values for this property at different times [X].

Library of Congress’ values for describing gender are limited (Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto, 2014), yet its gender element includes subfield codes to indicate the beginning and end date of a person’s identification with a specific gender identity, suggesting a non-static treatment of gender similar to FOAF’s specification. Schema.org indicates that the gender element can be populated with text strings for those who “do not identify as a binary gender.” Browsing the massive list of “genres” in GoodReads, a user can find the values “intersex,” “agender,” “genderfluid,” etc.; however, they are difficult to browse since they are accessible only through the massive alphabetical list of all genres or by following hyperlinks to related genres.

Furthermore, in schemas We Need Diverse Books, Diverse BookFinder, NoveList, Queer Comics Database, Queer Cartoonists Database, Poetry Foundation, and Anchor Archive, some elements include pre-populated values for refined searching. For example, We Need Diverse Books’ element “disability” attaches the values, “Chronic or terminal illness”, “Neurodivergence”, “Physical disability”, “Sensory disability”, which serve as refined access points (See Figure 2). In Queer Comics Database’s faceted search display, the “basket” element “Other Tags” contains 34 values like “queer disabled character” and “queer latinx character” that represent many diversities including religion, sexuality, age, and disability.



Figure 2: Screenshot from We Need Diverse Books Our Story Tool  
<http://ourstory.diversebooks.org/kids/1.05/#quiz&ui-state=dialog>

The categorization of indigenous peoples is of note across schemas. Not only is Diverse BookFinder the only schema with a distinct element for “tribe-nation”, the element is divided into 65 specific values, such as Lakota, Lakota Sioux, Cree, and Anishinaabe. Anchor Archive has an “indigenous” box category and GoodReads genre element contains the value “Native American” but neither schemas’ elements contain values that further differentiate tribal nations. We Need Diverse Books includes the value “Native, Indigenous, Aboriginal” under its “racial/ethnic identity” element and Queer Cartoonists Database includes values “first nations,” “indigenous,” and “Native American” in its “ethnicity(ies)/nationality(ies)” element.

In some schemas nationality and culture/ethnicity elements include drop-down menus containing values that tend to vary quantitatively and qualitatively across schemas. NoveList’s drop-down menu attached to the “author’s nationality” element includes 175 values, Queer Cartoonist Database includes 112, and We Need Diverse Books includes 31 values all describing nationality or culture. Library of Congress includes an abundance of terms describing nationality (345 values) and ethnicity/culture (104 values) but these terms populate “basket” elements and subject elements. In other words, a user cannot access nationality or ethnicity/culture via distinct elements specific to that characteristic. For the scant two schemas with some kind of race element, values relating to race are collected together with values relating to culture and ethnicity.

## Discussion

### *Tangled, conflated, and intersectional descriptions of identity*

Field scan findings reveal the immense difficulty of creating concrete access points for diversity of resource creators as well as resources themselves. The prevalence of “basket” elements speaks to the difficulty of classification and inclusion of specific descriptors for diversity. Because identity is difficult to parse and categorize, “basket” elements group together all that is difficult to separate or classify. These “basket” elements can support

nuanced and varied representations of identity and diversity because they do not rigidly delineate each identity characteristic into distinct elements. “Basket” elements may also facilitate browsing because of their power to collocate materials, potentially providing an information seeker a broad spectrum of resources. However, many “basket” elements identified in the field scan describe a resource’s subject and many scholars have shown the problematics of classifying identity in subject representation. Howard and Knowlton (2018) show the default assumption of whiteness in LC classification by a lack of equivalent entry subdivisions for white people. By making lists that compile all relevant classification for LGBTQIA and African American Studies, Howard and Knowlton underline the problem of access via subject that semantically and spatially separate diverse materials for users.

Nowhere is the difficulty of classifying diverse identity characteristics more evident than in the ways schemas handle elements describing race, culture, ethnicity, and nationality. Elements specifically relating to these identity-markers are combined and separated across schemas. This lack of delineation is often because many of these aspects of identity are overlapping and cannot be untangled. This tangle speaks to the concept of intersectional identities: the idea that social categories do not exist separately but rather are interwoven entities that impact and identify an individual (e.g. Crenshaw 1989). For instance, “basket” elements show a clear lack of concrete delineation among race/ethnicity, culture/nationality, and disability.

Additional conflation of elements around race, culture, ethnicity, and nationality reveal the difficulty of separating identity into autonomous pieces and therefore distinct descriptive elements. Diverse BookFinder uses an element called “race-culture” and one called “ethnicity”. The values populating “race-culture” are of note because they address the construction of race by cultural and phenotypical lines, evidenced by the inclusion of values like brown-skinned, black/African/African American, and White/European American/Caucasian. These values acknowledge the many modalities under which race is constructed. Queer Cartoonist’s Database uses an element called “ethnicity(ies)/nationality(ies).” The values populating this element are similar to Diverse BookFinder and to NoveList’s “Author’s Nationality” element. The values populating NoveList’s element “Author’s Cultural Identity” use many of the same values as nationality with the addition of some bi-cultural values such as African-American, Native American, Middle Eastern-American, and Middle-Eastern-Canadian.

Even where schemas acknowledge and attempt to account for the difficulty of concretely delineating identity descriptors for diversity, issues arise. For example, schema.org states that there is no “attempt to reach consensus at schema.org on what an ideal description of some type (Person, Place, TVSeries etc.) ought to contain” [XI]. Through such acknowledgement of myriad information needs and uses, schema.org offers open-ended possibilities for descriptive metadata. However, the lack of any regulation or guidelines regarding identity descriptions here not only leaves values uncontrolled (and therefore without the benefits of collocation and other affordances of standardized metadata), but also absolves the schema itself of any responsibility to represent creator or resource identities.

### *Erasure of identities through metadata*

Although these intersectional approaches to metadata elements and values may potentially offer more robust and nuanced descriptions of identity, grouping such identity characteristics together hinders the concrete delineation needed for users to access materials by and about specific identities. Grouping myriad values describing multiple components of diversity may limit a seeker's ability to hone their search by specific descriptors of identity. Although basket elements like "subject" or "genre" are considered access points, the massive amount and variety of information described by these elements may impede findability of any given resource or creator. Furthermore, the values populating a subject or genre access point may be obscure, out-of-date to the user, othering, or white-centric, as many scholars (e.g. Olson 2002, Adler 2017, Howard and Knowlton 2018, etc.) have shown in subject representation in controlled vocabularies. Such grouping also risks losing particular identities amidst a sea of descriptors. While parsing each diversity characteristic into a separate element may ignore the intersectional nature of identity evidenced by the prominence of "basket" elements, the lack of concretely delineated access points may lead to erasure of particular aspects of identities.

### *Absence of elements and values*

One major example is the description of disability. Of the few schemas that address disability, all differ in values, definitions, and access. Queer Comics Database includes values relating to disability under a basket element called "Other Tags," which generalizes and semantically others people with disabilities. We Need Diverse Books is the only schema in the field scan that includes a specific access point describing disability aspects within a resource. Values populating this element are as follows: chronic or terminal illness, neurodivergence, physical disability, sensory disability. While We Need Diverse Books does not overtly define its disability element, the values populating the element suggest an acknowledgement of different frameworks defining disability--for example, the inclusion of the value neurodivergence, a term often used to de-pathologize neurological difference. Other schemas addressing disability in "basket" elements suggest that multiple models of disability are combined under one category. The elements "Creator characteristics" and "Audience characteristics" present in MARC Authority and MARC Bibliographic define the value "medical, psychological, and disability" as "the medical or psychological condition, or the physical or mental disability, of the group members (e.g., alcoholics; breast cancer patients; people with learning disabilities)." This definition relies heavily on a medical model of disability which tends to pathologize the disabled person (Dirth and Branscombe, 2017). Whereas Anchor Archive defines the basket element "Body Politics" as "zines about body image and fat acceptance, abortion rights, disability. Also includes zines about hair and body hair as they relate to politics and identity and other zines about the politics of control over one's body." This definition places disability as a socially constructed phenomenon (Dirth and Branscombe, 2017). The model through which disability is defined can affect how disability elements and values are separated, grouped, and named which allows for both problematic or corrective metadata describing disability.



Another example of identity erasure is in the lack of elements describing indigenous peoples and tribal nations across all schemas. Excluding Diverse BookFinder, schemas that address indigenous peoples do so with “basket” elements. Placing indigenous peoples into a basket presents issues of clumping vastly diverse peoples under one heading. For example, Anchor Archive includes a box category title “indigenous peoples” but does not differentiate further into specific tribes or cultures. We Need Diverse Books’ inclusion of the term “native, indigenous, aboriginal” as a value for the “racial/ethnic identity” element groups all native identities together, thus overgeneralizing robust variety and difference and essentially erasing specific tribal identities. Notably, Diverse BookFinder made a conscious choice to describe tribal nations with specificity because “Native Americans are treated as a homogenous community, without acknowledgement that tribes and tribal-nations have distinct identities and cultures” (Aronson, 2018). Aronson brings to light an important issue of how the specificity of an element and the level of value granularity can affect how a demographic group or identity is framed, stereotyped, or made visible.

The absence of elements may not always speak to active erasure of identities, but an intentional decision to respect a creator’s choice to identify. Aronson (2018) of Diverse BookFinder states “Not every author is declarative about their own intersectional identities, and we feel it would be a greater disservice to make assumptions about who they are and their experiences. Without knowing that we could uniformly and adequately compile this data, we decided it was outside of our scope.”

#### Unequal recording of descriptive information

In addition to mere presence or absence, unequal recording of descriptive information at varying levels of specificity and granularity can also contribute to unintentional identity erasure. The level of value granularity within “basket” elements found in schemas proves problematic—for as much as a “basket” element circumvents the need to separate diversities that intersect, without robust values for describing these diversities, already marginalized populations could be further stereotyped and misrepresented. For example, included in NoveList’s broad category genre element called “Library Search Helpers” are values such as “African American Literature,” “Australian Fiction,” “New Zealand Fiction,” and “Canadian Fiction.” However, other values related to racial/ethnic/nationality identities, such as “Asian-American Fiction” or “Russian Fiction” do not exist. This unequal recording, especially under the heading “Library Search Helpers” suggests classifications borne of particular need or interest. NoveList defines “Library Search Helpers” as “headings [that] may not be considered genres in the traditional sense but were created as access points within NoveList so that readers can find these popular books.” Hence, the lack of recording does not suggest that Asian-American or Russian fiction does not exist, but rather speaks to access points created by demand and quantity. A problem of this approach is that demand is influenced by a specific user group, which means that diverse resources can go unnoticed if that user group does not know of or is uninterested in certain materials. Additionally, creating descriptive metadata based on the quantity of resources risks rendering invisible the smaller numbers of resources that highlight particularly underrepresented components of diversity.

Notably, Diverse BookFinder was observed to overtly address this issue by displaying descriptive labels even when there are no resources in the collection warranting them. For example, the values intersex, transgender, other, and agender are listed for the gender element, each accompanied by a parenthetical number '0' to indicate that no books in the collection use that descriptor. Aronson (2018) stated “there are many values in our system that show no data. Part of our work is in seeing the gaps in representation and communicating them. To the example of 'intersex,' we do not adhere to a binary construct of gender. Intersex people exist, yet too often diverse books do not tackle intersectional identities. We have not yet seen a book that talks about an intersex child of color, and that visible zero value denotes that absence.” Conversely, Library of Congress’ Demographic Group Terms that describe creator and audience characteristics are based on literary warrant, which means that a body of literature must already exist on a topic for a new descriptor to be added, and therefore cannot include values outside of those already in the collection.

### *Reification of cultural norms*

The prominence of the “basket” element and other prevalent elements describing creators and resources across schemas also reflect and reify beliefs and practices in American culture. Prevalent elements in both crosswalks suggest that certain identity descriptors like gender, occupation, geographic region, audience, and age (both in terms of creator’s age and a resource’s intended audience’s age) are stable and clearly defined. However (excluding the primarily inflexible characteristic of age), gender, occupation, and geographic region reflect an American social norm that these characteristics are prominently used as identification, easily defined, and immutable. Despite the use of these characteristics as steadfast markers, the mutability of gender and occupation is subtly evident in some schema specifications and values. The values associated with gender, notably, show to what degree the structure allows for variability. Navigating the Queer Cartoonists Database, for example, a user can select multiple genders from an abundant list in a search. MARC Authority includes start and end date subfields for describing gender, suggesting that gender can change, but does not require a cataloger to use these subfields. MARC Authority’s occupation element is repeatable, suggesting that a creator can have more than one or changing occupations. FOAF’s specification on gender acknowledges gender’s complexity, but without addressing this complexity systematically.

In addition to the “basket” element, the audience element is also prominent in resource description. While most schemas populate the audience element with values describing educational level or intended age, some schemas allow for broader values that may describe diversity. Similar to the affiliation element, which can include many non-diversity specific values, audience can also include diversity descriptive values. A problem of the audience and affiliation elements is the values populating them can limit the reach of a given resource or creator if one assumes that a resource featuring a particular demographic is described as only intended for that same demographic audience. This could perpetuate a belief that diverse materials are only for diverse audiences.

### *Potential ways forward*

This field scan revealed myriad issues with access points used to describe diverse reading materials, including the conflation of identity characteristics, the erasure of identities (intentional or otherwise), and the reification of cultural norms. Although we accept the argument that identities should be respected and prioritized above access (see for example Adler 2009, Thompson 2016, Lee 2018), access cannot be ignored. Librarians are already attempting to offer access to diverse reading materials, and the current non-systematic approaches are insufficient due to potential bias and lack of scalability. Additionally, access to diverse reading materials is critical due to the established benefits they provide, such as increased empathy and tolerance. Therefore, library catalogs and bibliographic metadata should be designed to support a balanced approach between socially just metadata practices that carefully consider issues of identity and metadata structures that enable access and retrieval.

### *Support for self-identification*

One seemingly obvious approach is to establish better provisions for metadata and systems that support self-identification as opposed to relying on librarians and catalogers to create and apply labels identifying diversity. Perhaps the most straightforward suggestion is to include increased ability for user-generated tagging and folksonomies. For example, Adler (2009) demonstrates how the user language of tagging can better describe the flexible and fluid nature of transgender identities. However, simply allowing tagging is not enough. In addition to all of the established issues with uncontrolled vocabularies in general, additional issues arise with folksonomic descriptions of diverse reading materials. Tagging is generally done for both personal and collective reasons, which means that individual perspectives and motivations (such as opinions about quality) underlie these user-generated labels (Smith, 2008). Additionally, tagging is not undertaken by a representative audience. In a study by Kipp, Beak and Choi (2017) exploring the use of tagging to enrich descriptions of materials from the Library of Congress, they found that 70% of participants were male and 29% were female, with the majority of participants ranging between 25 and 54 years old and holding a college degree. Bates and Rowley's (2010) comparison of three traditional library OPACs to LibraryThing's folksonomies in the treatment of "non-dominant" identities showed that user-generated tagging allows greater visibility of these identities. However, the dominance of American taggers evidenced "American universalism" in describing race and ethnicity. Because "LibraryThing only provides 15 tags for a resource [within an OPAC display], thus the disproportionate number of American users can significantly impact on the vocabulary that is assigned to resources" (p. 443). These highly skewed demographics do not reflect the ability of people with marginalized identities to describe themselves.

Other types of tagging, such as the use of the #OwnVoices hashtag on Twitter, may better reflect such self-identification. This hashtag was created to recommend resources "about diverse characters written by authors from that same diverse group" (Duyvis, n.d.), such as a book about Sudanese refugees written by a Sudanese refugee or a book with a Deaf character written by a Deaf person. While the hashtag has been useful in identifying

reading materials for library collections (Yorio, 2018), it functions only to identify diverse reading materials at a broad level unless coupled with additional hashtags describing more specific identities (e.g. #BlackGirlMagic, #ActuallyAutistic, etc.). Other approaches to user-generated metadata that might balance the need for access with respect for identities include workflows built on some kind of review process, (e.g. Bullard 2016, McCulloch 2019). Collaborative approaches, such as Tarulli's (2018) consultation with teens to label collections such as "Gender & Identity," can also serve as inspirational examples. Although many examples focus on metadata values, a similar participatory approach could be used in the development of new metadata elements to serve as access points for diverse reading materials, similar to Lougheed, Moran, and Callison's (2015) development of a metadata schema in collaboration with First Nations peoples.

#### (Im)permanence of metadata

Another obstacle to access points based on diverse identity characteristics is the traditional conceptualization that descriptive metadata should be permanent. Established traditions of library metadata rely on recording descriptive characteristics that do not change over time (e.g. Ranganathan's (1957) canon of permanence stipulating that descriptive characteristics should continue to be both ascertainable and unchanged, so long as there is no change in the purpose of the classification). Dobreski, Qin and Resnick (2019) suggest that using descriptors from multiple subject vocabularies can help searchers navigate descriptions that have changed over time. Yet not only do labels for identities change over time (from pejorative to more socially acceptable), identities themselves may change (e.g. gender identity, religious identity). Thompson (2016) explicitly points out the effects of the lack of flexibility in metadata regarding transgender people, such as the unethical practice of outing a person's identity without their consent, which may have serious repercussions in their work and personal lives. Thompson proposes the use of linked data to offer more fluid and flexible metadata, as well as the possibility of self-description (e.g. ORCID), where resource creators can describe their identities in ways they find accurate, appropriate, and useful. Thompson also argues that linked data can potentially shift the balance of power away from librarians as the authoritative decision-makers regarding identity descriptions. Other approaches that combat the permanence of metadata include systems intentionally designed to support what Feinberg, Carter and Bullard (2014) call the "residual"—descriptions that do not quite fit into existing category systems. Using a critical design approach explicitly intended to upend conventional assumptions about metadata, they show how and interactive systems for digital resource collections can highlight the residual instead of burying or erasing it.

#### Intentional and explicit positionality

The omission of particular identities seen in this field scan speaks to centric views of many kinds—ableism, sexism, racism, ageism, etc. Such erasure may be unintentional, stemming from the difficulty of determining appropriate elements and values to represent complex identities and constantly shifting definitions. Or it may be purposeful, such as a stated intention to destabilize normativity and prevent creators or resources from being pigeon-holed or stereotyped. The schemas specifically aimed at highlighting certain

diversities, such as We Need Diverse Books, Diverse Book Finder, and Queer Comics Database, aim to dismantle a “norm,” whether it be white centrality, white normativity, heteronormativity, or western-centrality. This may be accomplished explicitly, through statements of purpose and scope, or implicitly, via elements and perceived scope. Even within the intentional schemas, such purposes are achieved via both subtle and more overt methods. Some schemas that included a race/culture/nationality element included “white,” “European,” and/or “Caucasian” as values, indicating whiteness as an aspect of diversity rather than a norm that functions to ‘other’ non-whiteness. More overtly, Aronson (2018) specifically notes that the aim of the Diverse BookFinder’s design is “to create metadata that de-centers whiteness as a general standard and challenges absences in existing schemas.”

Such purposeful intention goes beyond the traditional objectives of library cataloging: to *find* materials, *identify* entities, *select* among entities, and *obtain* materials (IFLA, 1998). However, historical review of library catalogs shows that other alternative purposes and objectives exist, including navigation and discovery; education; social connection and interaction; and expression (Clarke, 2014). Feinberg (2010) has shown that library information systems express persuasive rhetorical arguments that reflect various points of view. Drabinski (2013) demonstrates this in action and calls for viewing library catalogs as complex and biased texts that must be read to understand their positions and points of view. Given that such positionality is inherent in every library catalog, we have evolved beyond the question of whether or not expression *should* be a purpose of library catalogs, to the question of *what should be expressed*. With diversity as one of the core values of American librarianship, libraries are charged with not just providing access to diverse reading materials—which they cannot do without access points—but promoting diverse materials and advocating for diverse populations. Therefore, library catalogs need to assume an explicitly intentional position of supporting such aims in their catalogs if they are to not only enable access to diverse reading materials but promote these materials to wider audiences and enable more transparent dialogic interactions between catalogs and users.

## Conclusion

With diversity as one of the core values of American librarianship, libraries are charged with promoting diverse materials and advocating for diverse populations. This field scan of thirteen schemas revealed that metadata elements and associated values from libraries and external sources describing gender, occupation, geographic region, audience, and age currently exist in many schemas and could potentially be used as access points for diverse library materials. However, this work also revealed that specific metadata elements and corresponding values necessary to represent racial, ethnic, national and cultural identity, are currently not present, at least not in a form that represents these aspects of identity in ways necessary for enabling resource access and collection assessment. Prominent elements suggest dominant American social practices and centralities. The use of a “basket” element, while supporting nuanced and intersectional identities, raises challenges in creating distinct descriptors. The lack of specificity in descriptive values, especially those intended to represent disability and indigeneity, implicitly erase the

identities of large groups of marginalized people. Although not without issues, separating diversity characteristics into more concrete access points may offer increased visibility of populations being rendered invisible in traditional information systems. Additionally, any access points to describe diverse reading materials needs to consider support for self-identification, impermanent and flexible metadata, and intentional and explicit positionality.

The field scan also reveals myriad issues regarding broader implications of representing diversity in metadata. Acknowledging that no system is neutral, each of these schemas express a particular perspective as regards diversity, whether implicitly or explicitly. Some schemas attempt to challenge normative societal perspectives, while others reify the status quo. Even in schema with explicit intentions to describe, highlight, and promote diverse resources, important questions arise. Does labeling for diversity perpetuate the “othering” of marginalized populations? Where is the line between labeling that highlights marginalized populations to promote equity and labeling that distills complexity into stereotype? How might we negotiate creators who do not want their identities or their works labeled? Ultimately, the findings raise more questions about the ability of diversity-related metadata to successfully serve as access points that must be answered before we can move forward with systems that help users and librarians find, access, and promote diverse materials.

## Notes

- I. <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/>
- II. <http://weneeddiversebooks.tumblr.com/FAQ>
- III. <http://anchorarchive.org/index.php/about>
- IV. <https://diversebookfinder.org/our-missionvision/>
- V. <http://www.foaf-project.org/>
- VI. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/foundation/about>
- VII. <http://queercartoonists.com/about>
- VIII. <http://queercomicsdatabase.com/>
- IV. <https://diversebooks.org/our-programs/ourstory/>
- X. <http://xmlns.com/foaf/spec/>
- XI. <https://schema.org/docs/howwework.html>

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