

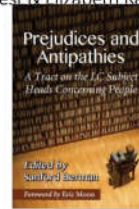
## Impact of Subject Heading Bias on Searching & Language

DERAIL 2016

## Beginnings of Change

Sandy Berman, 1971: *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People*

Celeste West & Elizabeth Katz (Eds.), 1972: *Revolt in Librarians*



## Background: Bias in Subject Headings

Studied since 1970s

Privilege a POV that is:

- White
- Male
- Christian
- Heterosexual
- Cisgender

Change has been slow and incomplete

## Critical Theory

Feminist Theory; Social Influences - Hope Olson (1990s - present)

Critical Race Theory - Jonathan Furner (2000s)

"Three Decades Since *Prejudice and Antipathies: A Study of Changes in the Library of Congress Subject Headings*" - Steven Knowlton (2005)

Queer Theory - Emily Drabinski (2010s)

## History of LCSH

1898: Beginnings of LCSH

1902: Standardized Card Distribution Service

1909 - 1914: First print edition of LCSH

1943: LCSH begins using references

1984: LC publishes *Subject Cataloging Manual*



## Current State

Main issues today:

- LGBTQIA
- Gender
- Indigenous knowledge
- Western bias

## Study Design

## Preliminary Results

## Survey

Online survey

Subject heading questions:

"Indians of North America"

"Sexual Identity SEE Gender identity"

Addressed use of language in:

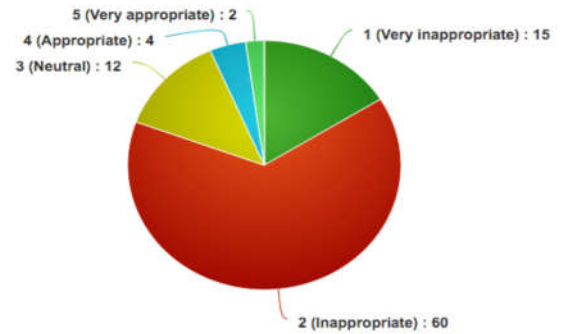
Scholarly communication

Everyday conversation

Signage in libraries & information centers



## Appropriateness of "Indians of North America"



## Interviews

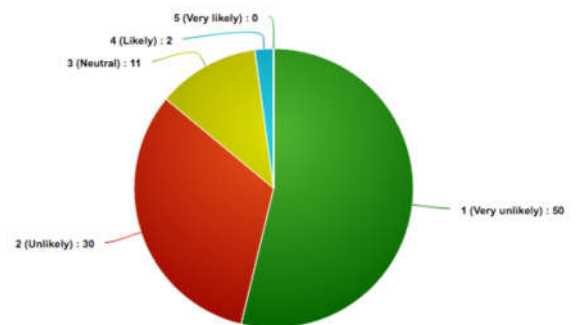
10 semi-structured interviews

Comfort/discomfort with subject headings and classification

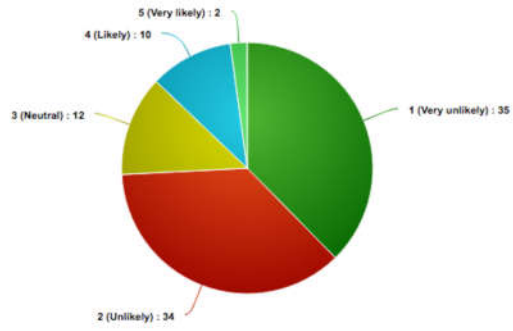
Response to biased subject headings

Current & future activism in information organization

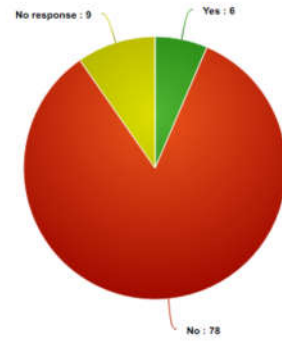
## Scholarly Communications



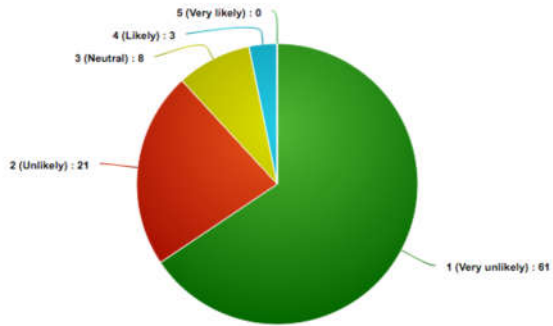
Everyday Conversation



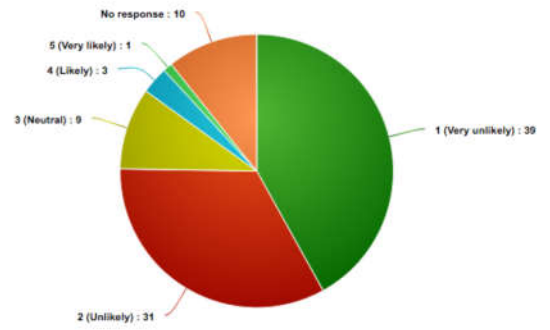
Equality of Terms



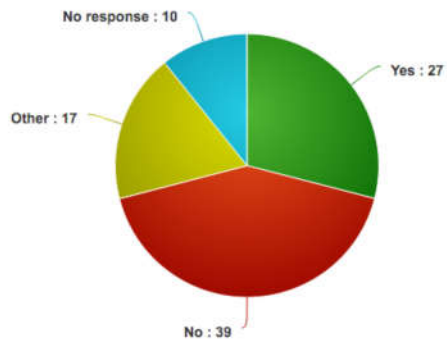
Library Signage



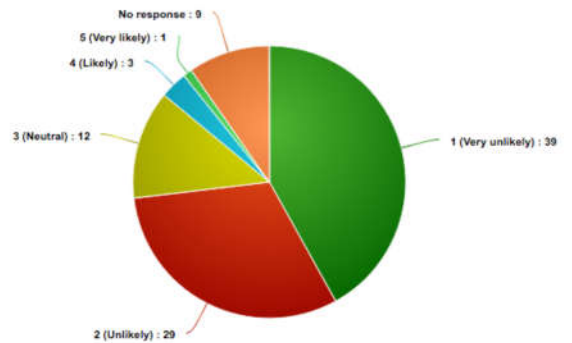
Scholarly Communications



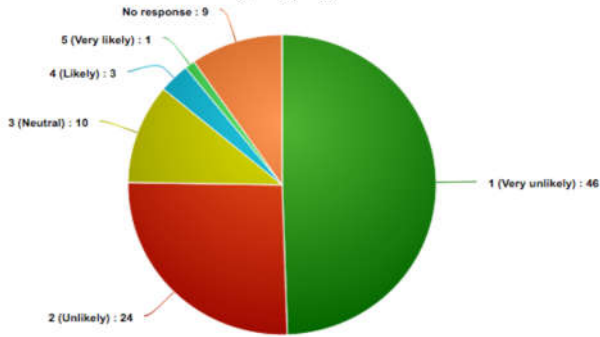
Appropriateness of Subject Headings



Everyday Conversation



### Library Signage



## Interview Results

### Search strategies

Keyword-based

Little reliance on subject headings

Language use generally does not change based on subject headings

## Survey Results

Everyday language: Less focus on appropriate terms

Signage: Highest use of appropriate terms

Disconnect between given subject headings and understanding of appropriateness/inappropriateness

## Interview Results

### Results of discomfort in searching:

Stopped searching

Changed topic

Unable to find enough/appropriate sources

Use of other sources like Goodreads, Amazon

Awareness that subject headings are not reflective of material

"Translation" of subject headings to users

## Interview Results

Many people felt discomfort with subject headings

LGBTQIA topics

Western bias

Gender

Marginalized communities

Desire to participate in activism for change, but no participation yet:

Lack of empowerment

## Questions & Discussion

## References

Berman, S. (1971). *Prejudices and antipathies: A tract on the LC subject heads concerning people*.

Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.

Code of ethics of the American Library Association. (2008). *American Library Association*. Retrieved from

<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/proethics/codeofethics/codeethics>

Drabinski, E. (2013). Queering the catalog: Queer theory and the politics of correction. *The Library*, 83(2).

Johnson, M. (2010). Transgender subject access: History and current practice. *Cataloging &*

*Classification Quarterly*, 48(8), 661-683.

Knowlton, S. A. (2005). Three decades since *Prejudices and Antipathies*: A study of changes in the

Library of Congress Subject Headings. *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 40(2), 123-145.

---

## References

Libraries and (post)modernity: A review of Radical Cataloging. (2012, June 27). BeerBrarian\_

<http://beerbrarian.blogspot.com/2012/06/libraries-and-postmodernity-review-of.html>

Olson, H. A. (2009). Social influences on classification. In *Encyclopedia of Library and Information*

*Sciences*, Third Edition. Taylor and Francis: New York, 4806-4813.

Stone, A. T. (2000). The LCSH century: A brief history of the Library of Congress subject headings, and

introduction to the centennial essays. *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 29(1-2), 1-15.

---