

Over the past two decades, the literature of the cultural heritage fields has witnessed a remarkable conversation reconsidering the ethics of basic practices and policies common throughout GLAMS (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums, and Special Collections). Among these, the principals underlying cataloging and classification have inspired the most discussion. As GLAMS grapple with realizing that “documentation media are not neutral forms,” and that their legacy data has “data legacies” that continue to affect, effect, and “haunt” present day practices, many have promised or undertaken reparative (re)description work.<sup>2</sup>

One area of the catalog in dire need of remediation work are access points describing queer subjects. Queer is used here as an umbrella term to refer to subjects with Marginalized Orientations, Relationships, Gender Identities And/or those who are Intersex (MORGAI). This is inclusive of LGBTQIA2S+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual, Two-Spirit, and more) individuals and communities, but recognizes that these terms are multifaceted, overlapping, and purposefully resistant of definition—queer, in other words.

In undertaking redescription work, the Homosaurus linked data vocabulary provides a critical and supplementary thesaurus for use alongside the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH; first published 1898) and/or other vocabularies to better capture the experiences and variety of queer lives, material, and experiences.<sup>3</sup>

In what follows, we will offer 1) a brief overview of literature concerning queer subjects, 2) a history of the Homosaurus, 3) an explanation of the technical backend, and 4) a review of the ways that the Homosaurus has been described or used in the current literature.

### Literature

The literature concerning efforts to develop inclusive and malleable, dynamic vocabularies for LGBTQ materials reveals an active and radical history. Led in large part by ALA’s Task Force on Gay Liberation, formed in 1971, this group of information professionals focused on improving bibliographic classification and subject headings for LGBTQ materials that had previously been indexed under headings such as “Sexual perversions,” or categories such as “Social pathologies,” which shelved LGBTQ materials beside books on pedophilia and other sex crimes. Prior to the task force’s intervention, LC catalogers often “relied on the definitions in psychiatric literature to determine the literary warrant of subjects related to sexual variance while ignoring and neglecting audiences and voices from other disciplines.”<sup>4</sup> This spoke to an outdated and dangerous practice of determining literary warrant through exclusive and singular measures of judgement.

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<sup>1</sup> Along with K. J. Rawson, Marika Cifor, Clair Kronk, Walter “Cat” Walker, Jack van der Wel, Jay L. Colbert and Steven Anderson; the Board of the Homosaurus International LGBTQ Linked Data Vocabulary. <http://homosaurus.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Hannah Turner, *Cataloguing Culture: Legacies of Colonialism in Museum Documentation* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2020), Introduction.

<sup>3</sup> Iva T. Stone, “The LCSH Century: A Brief History of the Library of Congress Subject Headings, and Introduction to the Centennial Essays,” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 29, no. 1–2 (2000): 2, <https://doi.org/10/drkk24>.

<sup>4</sup> Adler, “‘Let’s Not Homosexualize the Library Stacks’: Liberating Gays in the Library Catalog,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 24, no. 3 (September 2015): 491, <https://doi.org/10/gfwsh3>.

Pioneering radical librarian Sanford Berman contributed many proposals to LC during the 70's and 80's, publishing treatises on prejudices and pejoratives exemplified in the structure and verbiage of LCSH terms. Calling attention to the power of language to "underpin often malicious stereotypes, to de-humanize the subjects, transforming them into unsavory or at least worthless objects," Berman initiated workflow procedures for proposals of new terms which culminated in the current established practices, as seen through organizations like the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these leaps in progress, much conjecture over the ambiguity and context of preferred terminology has been almost endlessly debated by scholars and information professionals, resulting in disagreement over the "right" way to describe these queer subjects and groups. One such example of this can be given in the argument for universality over minoritization; or its opposite, contextualization and preference for minoritized terms over the more broad, ambiguous ones. Following the belief that using umbrella terms such as the LC heading "Gays" to apply to all materials effectively erased lesbians from the discussion, scholars such as Ellen Greenblatt favored the use of distinguishing terminology for distinct identities. Greenblatt noted that:

"... gay as an umbrella term referring to women as well as men is no longer reflective of current usage, as indicated by the number of gay- and lesbian-oriented groups that have consciously changed their names to incorporate both terms."<sup>6</sup>

Alternatively, activist Barbara Gittings vehemently supported the use of umbrella terms such as "Gays" to apply to queer subjects as a whole, believing that narrower terms, such as "Gay men" and "Gay women" should be used to distinguish accounts exclusively. Gittings further insisted that "the name change from Gay Task Force to Gay and Lesbian Task Force was a mistake, because the term 'gay' was inclusive and provided language for a unified front."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Guimarães et al. conducted a study examining local terms used by the LGBTQ community of Cariri, Brazil, from 2006 to 2013, finding that the power derived from this community by naming themselves was both an act of continued survival, a way to share cultural information in a private, coded mechanism, and a way to reconfigure the meaning of their shared spaces, speech, and collective identity.<sup>8</sup>

Serving as both a solution to these levels of ambiguity and to the de-structured content of tagging and cultural folksonomies, the development of authorized thesauri have been a tool used by librarians and scholars to contextualize their collections in a way that enriches them outside the expense of universal classification schemes and subject headings. Specialized thesauri support internal information organization, but they can also, as Donna J. Drucker points out, "be powerful tools for challenging and remaking information hierarchies and the social hierarchies embedded within them."<sup>9</sup> Drucker's argument could extend into the current moment: continued collaborations between users and GLAMS professionals are necessary for confronting and helping to remedy injustices (racial, sexual, gender) embedded in broader informational, social, and political systems—which is something the Homosaurus aims to support.

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<sup>5</sup> Sanford Berman, *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People*, 1971, 5 Emphasis in original.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Ben Christensen, "Minoritization vs. Universalization: Lesbianism and Male Homosexuality in LCSH and LCC," *Knowledge Organization* 35, no. 4 (2008): 230, <https://doi.org/10/ggcjs6>.

<sup>7</sup> Adler, "'Let's Not Homosexualize the Library Stacks,'" 497.

<sup>8</sup> José Augusto Chaves Guimarães et al., "Knowledge Organization and the Power to Name: LGBTQ Terminology and the Polyhedron of Empowerment," *NASKO* 6 (2017): 63.

<sup>9</sup> Donna J. Drucker, "How Subjects Matter: The Kinsey Institute's Sexual Nomenclature: A Thesaurus (1976)." *Information & Culture: A Journal of History* 52, no. 2 (2017): 207–28, <https://doi.org/10.7560/IC52204>

## Homosaurus

### History<sup>10</sup>

The Homosaurus International LGBTQ linked data vocabulary (or HomolT for short—the vocabulary's MARC code<sup>11</sup>), is freely available on the internet at <http://homosaurus.org>. Despite its current modern form, the vocabulary has deep historical roots: it is based on the internal thesaurus of Netherland's International Homo/Lesbian Information Centre & Archives (IHLIA). Two separate institutions—the Homodok research library at the University of Amsterdam and the Anna Blaman Huis of Friesland—pooled resources for LGBTQ+ history to form IHLIA, thereby creating one of the most extensive queer-specific collections in the world.<sup>12</sup> Upon their union, the newly-formed IHLIA (now called IHLIA LGBT Heritage) discovered a need to describe their combined collection, but found that there were little to no applicable subject terms. The resulting project, *Queer Thesaurus: An International Thesaurus of Gay and Lesbian Index Terms* (1997) was edited by Ko van Staalduinen, Henny Brandhorst, and Anja Jansma. From 2013 to 2015 Jack van der Wel and Ellen Greenblatt revised, edited, and transformed the vocabulary into linked data, adding hundreds of terms in the process.<sup>13</sup>

The current board was established by Jack van der Wel and K.J. Rawson in 2016. Rawson was drawn to the Homosaurus when he encountered the 2013 version in seeking a controlled vocabulary for the Digital Transgender Archive, an online repository for trans-related historical materials.<sup>14</sup> Beginning in 2016, the board has met monthly to add, delete, revise, and discuss queer nomenclature. In May of 2019, the second version of HomolT was released after significant revisions, mostly involving the removal of non-queer-specific terms and hierarchies. Since version two, the vocabulary is now updated biannually, usually in June and December, the joke being that Stonewall and Christmas are the two queer High Holy Days (followed closely by Halloween).

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<sup>10</sup> Earlier versions of parts this section were published in Brian M. Watson, "Homosaurus and Digital Transgender Archive," *SAA Reviews Portal*, June 17, 2019, <http://reviews.americanarchivist.org>.

<sup>11</sup> Network Development and MARC Standards Office, "Subject Heading and Term Source Codes: Source Codes for Vocabularies, Rules, and Schemes" (Library of Congress, November 20, 2020), <https://www.loc.gov/standards/sourcelist/subject.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Staalduinen, Ko van, and Henny Brandhorst. 1997. *A queer thesaurus: an international thesaurus of gay and lesbian index terms*. Amsterdam: Homodok.

<sup>13</sup> Jack van der Wel, "IHLIA - Making Information on LGBTIQ Issues in the Past and the Present Accessible and Visible," in *Serving LGBTIQ Library and Archives Users. Essays on Outreach, Service, Collections and Access*, ed. Ellen Greenblatt (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2011), 158–61.

<sup>14</sup> Watson, "Homosaurus and Digital Transgender Archive."

## Technical Discussion

The Homosaurus' platform was originally based on Opaque Namespace, a linked data service currently developed by Oregon State University Libraries and the University of Oregon Libraries.<sup>15</sup> Via the open source Controlled Vocabulary Manager, a Ruby on Rails application connected to Blazegraph, Opaque Namespace provides access to authority data via persistent URIs for use as predicates and objects in RDF statements.<sup>16</sup> Steven Anderson, a developer on the Homosaurus team, rebased the Homosaurus codebase to a three-part backend using Solr to display records, Postgres to store data and preservation metadata, and Blazegraph for querying.

One project undertaken by the Homosaurus team has been the direct mapping of Homosaurus terms to Library of Congress Subject Headings. As Homosaurus uses the Simple Knowledge Organization System (SKOS)—an ontology compatible with and similar to ISO 25964-1 thesauri—mappings from HomolT to LCSH are technically simple, if not always philosophically so. For example, the HomolT term “jealousy” (<http://homosaurus.org/v2/jealousy>) was mapped to LCSH's “Jealousy” (<http://id.loc.gov/authorities/subjects/sh85069852>) as an “External Exact Match,” indicating that the board believes the concepts to be exactly the same. Very often, however, LCSH will not have an exact match, so the board must indicate that LCSH either has an “External Close Match” - for example, HomolT's “Butches” could be a close match of LCSH's “Butch and femme (Lesbian culture)” - or, more often, no link is made between the two vocabularies at all.

Compared to traditional vocabularies like LCSH, the Homosaurus provides greater possibility to queer lives allowing cultural heritage institutions to better describe and provide access to queer subjects and material. The work of the vocabulary is ongoing and the board invites comments and engagements via our contact form at <http://homosaurus.org/contact>.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://opaquenamespace.org>

<sup>16</sup> <https://github.com/OregonDigital/ControlledVocabularyManager>