Forming an anti-racist and inclusive library catalogue at Cardiff University

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ABSTRACT

Details of a HEFCW (Higher Education Funding Council for Wales) funded project to create an anti-racist and inclusive library catalogue at Cardiff University. A project cataloguer was employed to assess the extent of problematic subject headings within the library catalogue. After researching the issue and identifying outdated and harmful terminology, remedial solutions and recommendations were proposed and then implemented. This article describes the processes undertaken throughout the project, including the removal or replacement of inappropriate headings (LCSH and MeSH).

Introduction: How the Project Came About

The library catalogue is a crucial tool for users of the library – enabling discovery of, and access to, the physical and online collections and information resources which support teaching, learning and research. Using the catalogue is part of the overall experience of using the library, which should be an inclusive experience that is welcoming to all users. Over recent years cataloguing staff at Cardiff University Library Services have become increasingly aware of the problems of language, representation and inclusivity within some Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) used within the library catalogue. Concerns that had been highlighted, for instance, by the Dartmouth College Libraries in the 'Change the Subject' documentary (2019) about a group of Dartmouth students who challenged anti-immigrant language in the Library of Congress Subject Headings (Change the subject, 2019). These are common legacy issues for university libraries, where terminology has been used historically and may not have been updated to reflect

current understanding and awareness of race equity issues. At Cardiff we were uncertain to what extent problematic headings were used within the library catalogue and the potential harm they might be causing. However, we didn't feel we had the capacity to tackle this issue in a meaningful way alongside a business-as-usual workload.

In October 2022 it was announced that the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) were providing funding to support race equality initiatives within the higher education sector in Wales. Cardiff University was looking for ideas for projects to take forward their priorities for progressing race equality and the Library Service was approached to see if they wanted to bid for any of the funding. A few ideas were raised including the concept of 'decolonising the catalogue' and the Cataloguing Team were asked if they wanted to formulate a bid. This needed to be done at fairly short notice but was achieved with the support of the University Librarian, Tracey Stanley. Out of the three bids submitted by the Library Service, two were successful, including the proposed cataloguing project to look at subject headings within the catalogue.

The funding we received enabled us to appoint a project cataloguer for six months part time. With hindsight we probably should have asked for a full-time post, but we were wary of bidding for too much funding (and being turned down), and we also had no real idea of the amount of work that would be entailed. After progressing through the recruitment process, we appointed Mouse Miller, who started in post in June 2023. Although we had some ideas about what we wanted the project to cover we were also very open to what the successful candidate would bring to the position.

Project Aims

The initial weeks focused on defining the scope of the project and what we thought was achievable within the time frame allocated. Addressing the issue of racist and/or otherwise prejudiced language in subject headings naturally involves conversations on broad, complex and challenging concepts, so it was important to concentrate our efforts on making a measurable difference to our catalogue with the resources we had available. We determined the study's purpose was to firstly conduct a scoping exercise to define the extent of problems in Cardiff University's library catalogue re. language, representation, and inclusivity issues within subject headings. The next step was to identify solutions and recommend remedial actions to move towards more inclusive representation within the catalogue, which would include:

- Identification and deletion of inappropriate LCSH & MeSH.
- Enhancing records with alternative subject headings, including the identification/agreement of alternative headings.
- Written documentation and guidance for the Cataloguing team to ensure the use of inclusive alternative subject headings becomes business as usual.

The project was conducted in four key stages: researching existing relevant projects and publications, locating harmful subject headings in the catalogue, identifying solutions and then implementing the proposed remedial actions in a sustainable way.

Stage 1: Research

The project would not have been possible without the extensive work already undergone in the sector to combat the limitations of, and harm caused by, controlled vocabularies. Consulting contemporary critical cataloguing scholarship, collective cataloguing resources and relevant case studies, the research stage of the project focused predominantly on exploring approaches to combat the limitations of, and harm caused by, controlled vocabularies such as LCSH and MeSH. This was in addition to wider questions of cataloguing ethics and the use of appropriate, inclusive language to describe marginalised peoples.

The study also conducted research into existing projects operated by other University libraries aiming to redress these issues; exploring the current strategies and practices of similar institutions which Cardiff University Library could potentially adapt for its own purposes. Particular attention was paid to cases where the institution used the same Library Management System as Cardiff University (Alma by Ex-Libris). Our study reviewed sources published within the last 5 years to ensure the findings reflected contemporary understanding of the topic, plus current methods and technology available to approach the problem.

Research - Outdated & Harmful Terminology

Our research primarily helped us gain an understanding of harmful terminology used to describe marginalised peoples and examples of harmful subject headings in LCSH and MeSH. The two significant issues identified were:

- Demonstrable bias ingrained within the hierarchical structure of controlled vocabularies (most notably LCSH).
- Subject headings that contain offensive and outdated terminology.

However, we quickly decided to only research approaches to mitigate the latter. The resources consulted that address structural bias in LCSH explain the issue but unanimously state that, because the problem is so inherently interwoven into its organisational framework, the only effective solution would be to overhaul or replace the vocabulary entirely. As the development of a new vocabulary as comprehensive as LCSH was far beyond the scope of this project, no further research on this potential action was conducted.

There were however numerous resources detailing examples of LCSH and MeSH containing offensive and outdated terminology, most notably; CataloguingLab's Problem LCSH (Fox, 2025 a) and Medical Subject Funnel (Fox, 2025 b) and the Inclusive Terminology Glossary created by Carissa Chew (National Library of Scotland, 2023) in

collaboration with the National Library of Scotland as part of the Inclusive Terminology Project[1]; as well as a glossary of terms used to describe different marginalised groups, including notes on the history, nuances and implications of the terminology and also notes authorised LCSH containing any harmful terminology, welcomes proposed additions and is actively updated (Cultural Heritage Terminology Network, 2021).

Of the noted resources, the Inclusive Terminology Glossary was found to be the most comprehensive and contemporary source on harmful language available, demonstrating notable research into the terminology listed. This facilitated a more holistic understanding of language both offensive and appropriate to a wide spectrum of marginalised communities at present, offering the largest compilation of terms which could be searched within the catalogue later during the project's scoping exercise. Although its focus is not subject headings within controlled vocabularies, the Glossary was found to contain the harmful language within the subject headings compiled in CataloguingLab's collective cataloguing resources when cross-referenced.

Guiding principles

More so than defining how to address harmful subject headings in the library catalogue, the majority of resources consulted placed emphasis on ethical values to guide and inform approaches to the issue. Multiple resources for example recommended following the principles and values listed in the Code of Ethics for Cataloguers (Cataloguing Ethics Steering Committee, 2021); an interpretive framework intended for use by cataloguers to inform their decision-making in accordance with best ethical practice.

Similar suggestions included creating one's own internal cataloguing policies and/or guidelines for inclusive description to ensure conscientious cataloguing practices are integrated into everyday practice. High importance was also placed on guaranteeing cataloguing staff receive suitable training and support in inclusive metadata practices. This has been the approach of organisations such as Harvard Center for the History of Medicine (Lellman, 2023), the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Alston et al, 2022) and Auckland War Memorial Museum (Whittaker, 2020).

The key principles recurring throughout the review were found to be:

• Maintaining awareness of and actively opposing the use of offensive and outdated terminology in subject headings.
• Using the most specific, current and accurate terminology available to describe the identity of an individual or group: centring their voices above the "curatorial" voice.
• Demonstrating accountability and being transparent in one's values, actions and shortcomings.

[1] The glossary has now also been made available as a wiki and renamed as the "Chew Inclusive Terminology Glossary" (National Library of Scotland, 2023).

Centring marginalised voices by prioritising how they wish to describe themselves was noted recurrently; in addition to identifying harmful language prevalent in controlled vocabularies, the literature notably highlighted community input to determine the appropriate terminology to use in its place. Numerous inclusive language guides and specialist glossaries created by and/or pertaining to a specific marginalised community were promoted as vital resources to understand what terms are current and preferred by the group in question. Many sources further suggested that institutions adopt a glossary of discriminatory/preferred terminology, or establish their own based on inclusive language resources, for internal staff use. The British Library for example has implemented this strategy as part of their Anti-Racism Project (Danskin, 2023).

Encouraging user feedback through strategies such as conducting user surveys was similarly noted, with the aim to facilitate an ongoing open dialogue between cataloguers and end-users. Some institutions such as Princeton University Library Archives and Manitoba University Library have utilised features in their catalogue interfaces such as in-built forms or item-level "Suggest a Correction" buttons that encourage users to report harmful material. Staff at Princeton note that this not only enables community input, providing a mechanism to alert staff to problematic description, but demonstrates accountability by ensuring "our description is assessed by outside communities without putting an uncompensated burden on those communities to do our work for us" (Bolding, 2018).

Further strategies to engage users with the issue and acknowledge institutional responsibility were present throughout the literature, with an emphasis on communicating practices, policies and cataloguing decisions in a transparent manner. The most prevalent option several libraries and archives have chosen to communicate their aims is via an official published policy, or institutional statement on harmful language, published on their website homepages, news or blog features, collections information pages, and/or social media channels. The Digital Public Library of America likewise includes a link to their Statement on Potentially Harmful Content at the top of their catalogue search page, whilst the University of Georgia Libraries note their statement in their catalogue footer. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)'s "Sensitivity message" on the other hand appears as a pop-up when users first open their library catalogue, which users must read and close before browsing resources.

In addition to recognising the issue of bias and offensive language in the library catalogue, whilst acknowledging responsibility for acting on these problems, some institutions have also opted to communicate their linguistic decisions by including the glossary of discriminatory/preferred terminology they use in their statements. Inclusion of an email address for the statement's author and/or team responsible may also further support transparency in the process and simultaneously provide an additional route for users to report harmful material.

Adapting existing LCSH & MeSH

The primary action suggested throughout the literature was the rejection of subject headings in controlled vocabularies that contain harmful terminology. It is acknowledged that, despite the issues, the benefits of employing two of the most widely used controlled vocabularies (LCSH and MeSH) are indisputable. With headings encompassing the majority of subjects in a general library collection, their comprehensive nature is applicable for most resources, and their extensive usage globally improves the interoperability, accessibility, and discoverability of records cross-institutionally. As LCSH and MeSH are created and updated consistently by external bodies and fully supported by modern library management systems such as Alma, they are also highly convenient options that often require no maintenance from library staff. To retain the benefits of using LCSH and MeSH, some libraries have opted to still use these vocabularies but use or adapt alternative headings in the place of headings deemed problematic.

For example, before the LCSH "Slaves" was updated to "Enslaved persons" in 2023, UCLA Library chose to substitute the heading with the existing heading "Slavery". Similarly, the LSCH "Slaveholders" could be substituted with the broader term "Enslavers" ([Biswas and Hallyburton, 2020](#)). The Canadian Research Knowledge Network has likewise utilised subdivisions to replace the LCSH "Indians of North America" with "Indigenous peoples" followed by "North America" as a geographical sub-division.

It must be noted however that substituting subject headings with existing alternatives within the same controlled vocabulary may result in less accurate subject description.

Further examples of adapting existing LCSH and/or MeSH are as follows:

A: Using authorised headings from other thesauri (LSCH or MESH)

Authorised term		Authorised term (other vocabulary)	
"Battered Women"	MeSH	$a Abused women	LCSH
"Illegal immigration"	LCSH	$a Undocumented immigrants	MeSH

B: Using subdivisions

LCSH	LCSH subdivision
"Education of mentally retarded"	$a People with mental disabilities $x Education
"Aboriginal Australians"	$a Indigenous peoples $z Australia

C: Using broader/less specific terms

Authorised term		Broader/less specific term	
"Mental Retardation, X-Linked"	MeSH	$a Intellectual disability

AND

$a X chromosome - Abnormalities | 2 LCSH terms |
| "X-linked mental retardation" | LCSH | | |
| "Slaveholders" | LCSH | $a Enslavers | LCSH broader term |

Local subject headings

An alternative option to using critiqued LCSH and MeSH includes implementing local subject headings as replacements; employed by other higher education institutions such as the University of Colorado Boulder Libraries (López and Wright, 2018) and SUNY (SUNY (State University of New York) Office of Library and Information Services, 2023), the creation of local subject headings allows the cataloguer full control over the terminology used without the constraints of an existing controlled vocabulary. However, very few sources commented on the actions needed to employ local subject headings effectively, and there are several limitations to this approach. Agreement of terminology, potential migration issues during technological updates, plus the time and maintenance required in-house to upkeep authority files for local headings and corresponding documentation must be considered.

Alternative vocabularies

Where no appropriate heading exists within more widely used controlled vocabularies such as LCSH, a number of sources recommended employing terms from alternative specialist thesauri. The Cooperative Computer Services Public Library Consortium in Illinois for example uses the thesaurus Homosaurus: an international LGBTQ linked data vocabulary to create additional access points for subjects not encompassed by LCSH alone- e.g., the Homosaurus subject heading "Pansexual people", which has no equivalent in LCSH (Fischer, 2023).

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650 _7 $a Pansexual people $2homoit
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Numerous alternative vocabularies centring the experiences of, and terminology used by, marginalised communities have been developed to provide more accurate subject description to the records assigned them. Some examples of these thesauri include the following, which are recognised sources each assigned with an individual source code ($2) for use in OCLC records (and local records, LMS settings permitted).

Vocabulary	$2 Source code
African Studies thesaurus (ASC Leiden)	ascl
AIATSIS Subject Thesaurus	aiatsiss
AFS Ethnographic Thesaurus - The American Folklore Society	afset
Chicano Thesaurus	cht
First Nations Metis and Inuit Indigenous Ontology	fnhl
Gender, Sex, and Sexual Orientation (GSSO) ontology	gsso
Homosaurus: an international LGBTQ linked data vocabulary	homoit
Ngā Ūpoko Tukutuku = Māori Subject Headings	reo

However, these vocabularies are primarily intended to supplement other controlled vocabularies, not replace them, and there are currently no marginalised community-centred thesauri supported as Authorised Vocabularies in Alma. To employ these headings as a controlled vocabulary, the library must create and maintain corresponding local authority files; presenting the same aforementioned issues faced by utilising local subject headings.

Methods of amending subject headings

Despite ample discussion of LCSH and MeSH and their potential alternatives, significantly fewer publications discussed the process of replacing these subject headings; particularly within a large library catalogue where locating and amending harmful terminology may be more challenging.

The State University of New York (SUNY)'s "Change the Subject Project" (SUNY (State University of New York) Office of Library and Information Services, 2023) proved the most useful resource detailing step-by-step methods of how the library replaced selected subject headings with alternatives; namely through running normalization rules in Alma and display normalization rules in PrimoVE Display.

Written in a specific syntax, normalization rules can be created to implement specific changes to bibliographic records; either individually or to a set of records via running a manual job in Alma. Normalization rules can be used to add, delete or edit fields and can be done conditionally, based on a defined condition that does or does not take place in the bibliographic record. SUNY for example uses normalization rules to replace specified LCSH with their devised local headings, allowing bulk changes to multiple records simultaneously.

Display normalization rules in PrimoVE Display control and/or change the way specified metadata is seen by catalogue users, as opposed to changing metadata in the bibliographic records themselves. For instance, a display normalization rule can be written to change the display of the subject heading "Fugitive slaves" to "Fugitive

enslaved persons", mapping the specified problematic term to a chosen alternative, without changing the subject heading in the record itself.

Altering the public display layer of the library catalogue could be an effective strategy to address harmful subject headings where no suitable and/or accurate alternative exists; maintaining a heading's connection to its wider vocabulary whilst having full control over the terminology used. Although this method does not resolve the issue of inappropriate subject headings within the catalogue, as the original heading appears unchanged to Alma users, preventing the end user from encountering offensive terminology does reduce potential harm. This approach has been recommended by similar investigations into the issue, such as the Report of the SAC Working Group on Alternatives to LCSH "Illegal aliens" (Fox et al, 2020).

The adaptability and repeatability of running normalization rules in Alma and PrimoVE Display can also be considered a significant advantage, particularly as the ever-changing nature of language may necessitate ongoing revision to records to ensure that terminology in use reflects current understanding.

Stage 2: Scoping and locating problematic subject headings

Following on from the research aspect of the project a scoping exercise was held to locate harmful subject headings within the University library catalogue and determine the scale of the issue, this also included a structured group discussion with the ULS cataloguing team to develop a strong understanding of their workflows and practices.

The scoping exercise was conducted with the aim to determine if subject headings containing incorrect and offensive terminology were in use in the library catalogue (it was fully expected that they were), and if so, what these inappropriate headings were. We also needed to determine the source of the headings – be it LCSH, MeSH, local or undetermined, and the extent to which the catalogue was affected. Just how many records and headings would we be dealing with; what was the scale of the problem?

Search terms located

The search terms of the scoping exercise were directly informed by the Inclusive Terminology Project as noted above. The terminology listed is divided by marginalised group, however some terms appear on multiple occasions if used to describe multiple communities; for example, the term "savages" has been used as a highly offensive, derogatory term to describe African Americans, Native Americans and many groups of Indigenous Peoples, so appeared more than once throughout the Glossary.

The number of terms per marginalised community noted within the Inclusive Terminology Glossary (as of July 2023) are as follows. The total number of terms totalled 2752 which, after excluding duplicate and inoffensive terms, brought the number of terms searched for as part of the scoping exercise to 1897.

Search terms (informed by Inclusive Terminology Glossary)	
African American History & the Atlantic Slave Trade	212
Native American History	84
Indigenous Peoples of Canada, Greenland, Siberia, and the Russian Far East	74
Aboriginal Peoples of Lands Now Known as Australia & Aotearoa (New Zealand)	110
History of Hawai'i and Native Hawaiians	67
Empires and Imperialism	361
Travelling Communities: Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller	144
Contemporary Slurs	220
Disability and Mental Health History	368
LGBTQIA+ History	655
Women's History	96
History of Masculinity	31
History of Antisemitism	68
Sectarianism in Scotland	32
Working Class History	168
Locations & Place Names	62
Total number of terms	2752
Duplicates (terms found in multiple categories) & Inoffensive Terms	855
Total Search Terms	**1897**

Figure 1: Scoping results

From the 1897 terms searched using the Subject Search report (detailed below), 200 (approx. 10.5 %) of those terms appeared within subject headings currently in use in the library catalogue, affecting a total of 31,512 records (see Figure 1).

Initial methods to conduct machine-assisted keyword searches for inappropriate terminology utilised existing tools within Alma; searching via Advanced Search by "Subject" and via the Browse Bibliographic Headings tool available within the Resources > Cataloguing menu. However, these methods had significant limitations.

Although using Advanced Search by "Subject" to locate inappropriate terminology successfully retrieved records containing the search term, it did not search the Subject MARC 6XX fields exclusively. Consequently, the search results included many records where the search term appeared in bibliographic or notes fields (e.g. MARC 245 Title or MARC 5XX Notes) as opposed to subject fields (MARC 6XX), and thus not relevant for the purposes of this study.

Searching via Browse Bibliographic Headings searches within one of the controlled vocabularies supported by Alma (e.g. LCSH) and successfully retrieves any bibliographic records that include the term in its subject fields. However, this tool cannot browse vocabularies not supported by Alma (such as local headings) or instances where a subject headings' source is not specified, which neglects many older records in the University's catalogue.

Both search methods also included deleted records and community zone records in their search results. As inactive records and records that Cardiff University does not have executive control over have been excluded from this study, the search methods consequently retrieved many irrelevant results.

With no appropriate tools readily available in Alma, the Systems team at Cardiff University devised a customised report to retrieve all records (relevant to the needs of the study)- assigned with subject headings containing the search term entered. Made available via the CU – Cataloguing Dashboard in Alma Analytics, the Subject Headings Report can be run at any time by staff with CU – Cataloguing access[2].

The Subject Search Report only retrieves records that are active, not linked to the community zone and contain the search term in MARC 650 (Subject Heading) fields, regardless of the vocabulary source (e.g. LCSH, MeSH, local or undetermined). The report results detail:

- Key bibliographic information (Title, author and publisher)
- Record MMS ID
- All subject headings applied to each record (including headings that do not contain the search term)
- Number of active titles per record

[2] See accompanying article by Stallard, Pierce & Miller (2025) for further details about this report.

Following identification of any search terms located within subject headings currently in use in the library catalogue, the report results were subsequently reviewed to determine how many records each term affected and ascertain the context of each term. This was necessary in many cases, as several of the search terms were appropriate in some contexts but inappropriate in others (e.g., the term "exotic" is applicable when describing fauna and flora, but highly inappropriate to describe people of colour). It was decided that only terms which could be confirmed as harmful (regardless of context or if found in an inappropriate context) would be actioned within the scope of the project due to time constraints and available resources.

The context analysis was conducted using additional bibliographic data from the report results, such as the resources' title or other assigned subject headings, to determine the context of the term searched (and subsequent appropriateness for use). Terms found in an appropriate context, or that required further information to determine their context, were excluded from the final list of terms/records affected to be actioned within the project.

The report results of the remaining terms found to be definitively inappropriate were reviewed again to determine which subject headings containing the search term were in use, how many of these headings there were, plus the number of instances each heading was used.

The Subject Search report was a highly effective method of identifying which and how many records contain inappropriate subject headings. However, determining the number of subject headings containing the search term, plus the number of instances each heading was used, proved more difficult as the report condensed all the headings applied to a record into one cell. With up to hundreds of records retrieved per search term, determining each subject heading variant and number of appearances without being able to easily filter the results was highly challenging. The Systems team subsequently created an additional report which delimits the subject headings assigned to each bibliographic record into separate columns; the separation of data into different cells easing the process of identifying the different variants of the search term/subject headings in use.

Where the search term(s) to be actioned within the project retrieved a significant number of results (>10 records), the term was searched again via the Delimited Report. The Delimited Report results were subsequently downloaded into Excel, where the data was manipulated to determine every subject heading variant that contained the search term and the number of records each heading affected.
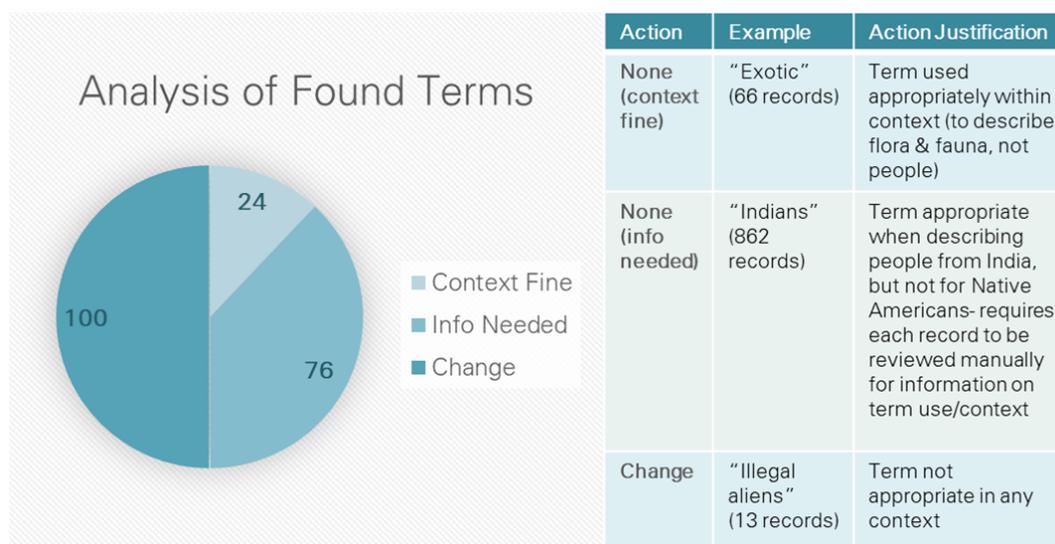
Review of found terms

The review findings concluded that action was required for 50% (100) of the terms located, substantially reducing the number of records considered for editing from 31,512 to 8235.

The majority of the terms considered harmful/to be amended were inappropriate in any context, including "Blacks" (Black people), "Negroes" (Black people) and "Slaves" (Enslaved persons). 50% (100) of the terms located were excluded from actioning within the project due to either:

- Their context being appropriate (i.e., not harmful or offensive to a community) (24).
- A lack of information required to determine an appropriate action (76).

Action	Example	Action Justification
None (context fine)	"Exotic" (66 records)	Term used appropriately within context (to describe flora & fauna, not people)
None (info needed)	"Indians" (862 records)	Term appropriate when describing people from India, but not for Native Americans- requires each record to be reviewed manually for information on term use/context
Change	"Illegal aliens" (13 records)	Term not appropriate in any context

Figure 2: Analysis of found terms

After review, 24 of the 200 search terms identified were found to only appear in appropriate contexts and thus redacted from the list of terms to be actioned. For example, the word "exotic" was searched for as part of the scoping exercise due to its history of use by white people to Other and fetishise people of colour. "Exotic" was found in 66 records, but reviewing these records determined the term was used only within the subject heading "Exotic flora and fauna". The term "exotic" is inappropriate to describe people but applicable in this instance, so no action was required.

An appropriate action for 76 of the 200 search terms identified could not be determined because further information was needed. This was either due to the number of records the term appeared in being too large to review within the scope of this project, or because the resulting records did not contain enough information to determine the term's context.

"Indians" for example was searched for because the term has controversially been used as a homogenising label with colonialist roots for Native Americans (e.g. "Indians of North America", "American Indians" etc.). However, the term is appropriate when describing people from India, South Asia. Consequently, each record assigned a subject heading containing "Indians" must be reviewed individually to identify the term's use and context before determining an appropriate action. However, searching this term yielded a total of 862 results and there was unfortunately not enough time

available within the constraints of the project to review such a large quantity of records effectively; further investigation would be required at a later point.

"Talisman" was searched due to the term's often incorrect usage to exoticise artefacts from non-European cultures, identifying 4 records for review. However, the accompanying data included in the report results used to identify the resources' subject (title and other assigned subject headings) were not sufficient to determine if the term was being used appropriately. Further review of each record individually within Alma and potentially consulting each resource itself would be required to determine the context the term was found in, which fell outside the project's capacity due to the time and resources available.

The 100 terms confirmed for further investigation/action were searched again via the Subject Search Delimited report, to determine every subject heading and/or subject strings containing each term currently in use.

Stage 3: Identifying solutions and recommendations

Findings from the selected publications and existing projects, as well as the results of the scoping exercise, were then used to propose recommended remedial actions appropriate to the needs of and resources available to ULS' cataloguing team. These were presented in a final project report that was submitted not only to the cataloguing team but to the library Senior Management Team for approval.

Stage 4: Implementing the proposed remedial actions in a sustainable way.

After identifying the problematic terms contained within the library catalogue, and how many bibliographic records this affected a number of recommendations were presented to deal with the problem. Primarily we needed to determine alternatives to the outdated subject headings using authorised LCSH and/or MeSH, as had been suggested in the literature. Agreed alternatives were compiled into a department Glossary of 'discriminator/preferred' terminology that the cataloguing team could refer to and adapt going forward. These terms were then used to update the problematic headings. This was done by utilising normalization rules to make bulk changes to the majority of problem headings, as has been detailed in the accompanying article by Stallard, Pierce & Miller (2025), followed by manually editing the remaining records.

For those headings where no suitable alternative LCSH or MeSH was available we altered Primo Display settings via display normalization rules as discussed above and also detailed in the accompanying article (Stallard, Pierce & Miller, 2025).

As language consistently evolves and changes, issues concerning terminology, representation and inclusivity will always be present in our efforts to label individuals and communities. There is not, nor ever will be, a conclusive resolution. However, actively acknowledging the problem and acting with sensitivity, with the resources and

knowledge available to us, is the most effective step towards an inclusive, anti-racist library catalogue.

To ensure that the project wasn't just a static action, monthly language sensitivity reviews were established via an automated monthly report that searches for outdated terminology in subject heading fields of active records not linked to the community zone, which have been edited or imported within the last month. The report results, and identified records, are emailed to the cataloguing team inbox to be actioned accordingly by utilising the department Glossary. In addition, an annual language sensitivity review has been set as a cataloguing team annual task, whereby the team reviews the Inclusive Terminology Glossary, LCSH and MeSH updates for the past 12 months and ensures language sensitivity practices are amended accordingly.

Some further, long-term recommendations were also included in the project report, namely that the Cataloguing team should attempt to fulfil the following actions:

- Create and implement a descriptive and interpretive practice policy regarding conscientious cataloguing informed by the Cataloguers' Code of Ethics for the cataloguing team, as a framework to guide decision-making.
- Create and publish a statement on harmful language on the library website to acknowledge the issue of problematic language within the library catalogue and how it is being actively addressed. Add a link to this statement at item-level on Primo.
- Encourage users to report harmful material by adding an item-level "Suggest a Correction"/"Harmful Language Feedback" button/form to Primo, which emails any form submissions directly to the cataloguing team.
- Contest inappropriate LCSH and MeSH directly (e.g. via Subject Authority Cooperative (SACO) Program or CataloguingLab) to actively address the issue of harmful terminology in subject headings at its source.
- Compile guidance for internal use by the team around cataloguing ethics and inclusive language, and undertake training in the processes recommended from this project.

Challenges / learning points

The key challenge of this project was undoubtedly the lack of information available detailing how to locate inappropriate subject headings and terminology within bibliographic records. Although an extensive amount of sources recommended the boycott of biased and/or offensive subject headings, taking action to amend records containing these headings retrospectively, little information was available on how to initially identify and retrieve records affected by these issues.

Similarly, there was a significant lack of existing projects exploring how to effectively replace specified subject headings with defined alternatives. Despite ample discussion of what headings should be changed and what terminology should replace them, few

sources discussed how to achieve this. This was particularly challenging considering the scale of Cardiff's library catalogue, as manually editing records individually would be highly time-consuming. Although case studies such as SUNY's Change the Subject Project helpfully noted the normalization rules they employed in Alma and PrimoVE Display, this project considered a significantly larger set of subject headings and required more complex changes.

Subsequently, developing and testing effective methods to conduct the scoping exercise and large-scale amendments to subject headings required more time than initially anticipated.

We were very aware that language changes rapidly over time, meaning that this issue will likely never be resolved, so there was the need to create processes that can be easily repeated/followed/adapted over time. We also wanted to automate processes as much as possible to reduce workload, and to ensure that going forward detailed documentation and guidance for the cataloguing team was available.

(Post)-Implementation Actions and Conclusions

Mouse left at the end of January 2024 having accomplished a huge amount for the project – really demonstrating what can be achieved when you have dedicated staff time. Alongside Vicky they had ensured that all the identified changes had been made in the catalogue and the monthly report set up to run, although they left before the first monthly report was produced. As a team left without our project cataloguer we felt a bit bereft, knowing that it was now up to us to keep the momentum going. The first monthly report was larger than expected, although in retrospect completely manageable. Despite all of Mouse's extensive documentation people felt unsure of how we were to tackle this alongside our normal work. Having overseen the project Karen was in position to manage expectations and reassure colleagues about how the work could be achieved. This initially entailed writing a very basic set of instructions for everyone to follow, pointing them to Mouse's guidance in various places, but essentially a step by step walk through of what needed to be done. The list was split between team members to work through, then we met to discuss any headings that had caused problems. Most queries we managed to resolve amongst ourselves, but there were a few where we felt we didn't have the wider understanding about what the preferred term should be. This highlighted the need for further training and awareness, and the gap we felt without our resident expert.

Subsequent lists have been shorter and contained a varying proportion of items that were dealt with the previous month because we add a 997 note to indicate that headings have been updated or reviewed. The addition of the note means that the record has been amended and is thus potentially flagged the following month if the trigger term is still contained within the headings. For example, 'Blacksmith' is flagged because it contains 'Blacks' within its structure. This will not be changed and so will recur the following month as the addition of the 997 note has amended the record. The

monthly lists have now been happily absorbed into business as usual, with any problems being discussed at our monthly team meetings.

For the post project recommendations, at the time of writing we are just about to embark on the annual review, with some trepidation regarding workload without a dedicated staff member to lead the way. We are aware that if this is to be done thoroughly and meaningfully it will take considerable time to complete. As the department has also just been involved in a move to a different physical location we are still dealing with the upheaval, and the adaptation of altered working patterns.

The Statement on Harmful Language was added to our library webpages in October 2024, with a link from Library Search (Primo) added a few weeks later. The text was predominantly written by Mouse but needed to be discussed and approved by the Library's EDI group (of which Karen is a member), and the Senior Management Team. Discussions were also held about where best to place the text, both on the webpages and on the library catalogue. The text was then also translated into Welsh. We know that many library services across the country are adding these statements to their webpages or catalogues and were thus pleased that we had also achieved this. We will be entering into discussions with other WHELF (Welsh Higher Education Libraries Forum) institutions to see if we can either add a WHELF-wide statement at some point in the future or ensure that all WHELF institutions have their own statement (some already do). We are also hoping at a later date to add an item level "Suggest a Correction"/"Harmful Language Feedback" form to the library catalogue, as per Mouse's recommendation, enabling users to more easily and directly respond to the language they encounter.

A more informal recommendation was that where possible we would share the work that had been achieved. In the initial stages of the project we discovered there was a lot of information about what issues were with outdated subject headings and why the problems should be addressed (as noted above) but less literature on the practical ways to take remedial action. This has begun to change over the last twelve months, not least as evidenced by this issue of C&I, and the various books reviewed within it, and we wanted very much to be part of the conversation and hopefully have others benefit from our work. In addition to this current article the three of us, in various iterations, have given talks and presentations to a number of different interested parties across the UK and Ireland.

Having a dedicated (albeit temporary) staff member was crucial for us in getting this work started, and we now have to ensure that we embed this good practice into our daily workflows. The monthly reports take up little time, the analytics reports and normalization rules can be fairly easily amended to accommodate changes and updates, and LCSH and MeSH are making regular improvements which automatically update in our LMS. It should be noted that although the project was framed around being 'anti-racist' in our catalogue, other protected characteristics were not ignored; in fact no differentiation was made, the approach was for inclusivity across the board.

All in all this is a deeply complex and ongoing issue that must be addressed with both ethical and practical approaches in mind, requiring further actions which balance:

- Proactive opposition to use of harmful language
- Centring marginalised voices
- Demonstrating our actions transparently
- Maintaining record quality and discoverability (ensuring subject access to facilitate access and promote discovery)
- Repeatability and adaptability going forward
- Effectiveness within the time & resources available

Inclusive cataloguing and metadata work must become the norm.

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