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Accuracy of Identity Information and Name Authority Records

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Introduction

For those who have used library catalogs, the importance of name authority control

is quite obvious. Without name authority control, searching a library catalog would

be much more difficult and inefficient; library users would have difficulty finding

resources since different works by the same author may be under different forms of

the name, and users could easily confuse different authors with the same name.

Disambiguating information for the purpose of collocation is one of the primary goals

for name authority files. In most cases, authority records are useful for organizing

information about authors with multiple names or the same names used by different

authors. Pre-RDA name authority records offered enough information for

disambiguating names, but RDA name authority records offer significantly richer information that is expected to improve library users' search experience much more. With linked data, information contained in name authority records will be shared beyond the library community.

Diligent catalogers may search as much as they can to collect detailed information about a person. Catalogers place much importance on the accuracy of the records they create. But what exactly is "accurate information" about a person's identity? Is it (a) as close as possible to how society as a whole perceives that person? Or is it (b) as close as possible to the role that person plays in the specific literary or academic community? Or is it (c) as close as possible to how one perceives oneself (or how one requests the society to perceive oneself)? (a) could be further divided as (i) what appears on the person's official records and (ii) how the person is frequently viewed by other individuals. How do catalogers know if there is a discrepancy between their description of a person and that person's self-identification? Significant problems may arise when these different levels of identity are confused.

If name authority files are to be used to organize information for library users, then what they primarily deal with is one's "bibliographic" identity that makes the most sense within the context of the bibliographic community, and is not necessarily how a person self identifies. But, of course, this does not mean that library professionals can invade a person's privacy or misrepresent their view of their identity in order to broaden a library user's search experience. So far it is up to each cataloger to decide how much personal information can be included in name authority records. But it would be nice to have some kind of criteria as to what catalogers should or need not include in authority records. To have such criteria, we need to think about what roles names play in the information world and how much impact that catalogers could make by creating or adding information to name authority records.

Recording more accurate and detailed information about a person means more aspects of that person get revealed. A person as a whole can be sliced up in many different ways by society, culture, and the linguistic communities to which that person belongs. Sometimes an aspect that is "accurate" by one definition may not be

"true" by another. As a primary example of this, gender information will be discussed later in this chapter.

To understand the problem, this chapter will review related theoretical literature: philosophy of language that deals with the meaning of names and identity; and feminism and queer theory's views of the fluid nature of gender identity. By doing so, it offers both theoretical and practical aspects of the identity issues name authority records may contain. Catalogers need to understand how complex issues regarding personal names and one's "identity" are and recognize that the ethical responsibilities and the magnitude of influence they have in creating name authority records are greater than ever.

Philosophy of Language Approach to Name Authority Records

To understand what impact name authority records potentially have, it may help to consider what kind of information personal names carry and why organizing names

in the bibliographic world is important and at the same time contains sensitive issues.

Disambiguating information regarding names is not as simple as it may seem if personal names are more than mere tags or signs. Some philosophers of language have explored the meaning of names and their views may help us understand what information names carry.

The simplest and most intuitive view of the meaning of personal names is that what personal names mean is the people who are called by those names. In this view, names are mere tags and nothing else. Some philosophers hold this view and argue that names are arbitrarily attached to things and their meanings are what they denote or refer to.[1]

But there are some philosophers who think differently. For example, Gottlob Frege, a logician and philosopher of language (1848-1925) wondered why an identity

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[1] John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic : Ratiocinative and Inductive,* 8th ed. (New York and London: Longmans, 1965); For direct reference theory that drew upon the work of Mill, also see: Hilary Putnam, *Mind, Language and Reality* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1975) and Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

statement between two names carry any information.[2] If names are arbitrary tags,

then "a = a" and "a = b" should mean the same when "a" and "b" are names of the

same thing. But they seem to offer different information. For example, "Clark Kent

is Clark Kent" is a mere tautology, but "Clark Kent is Superman" surprises Lois Lane

because she clearly acquires new information from it. According to Frege, when

multiple names denote or refer to the same thing, they share the same meaning (a

person, in this case). But they may have different "senses." A sense is a "mode of

presentation" of a meaning. It can be interpreted as a piece of information about that

person that people grasp and share associated with a particular name used for that

person. So according to Frege's view, "Clark Kent" and "Superman" refer to the same

person, but have different senses. The sense of "Clark Kent" may be something like

"a mild-mannered journalist" and the sense of "Superman" may be "a powerful

superhero." Then, the information that the identity statement "Clark Kent is

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[2] Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Meaning," in *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, ed. Peter Geach and Max Black (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980) 56-78.

Superman" carries is "a mild-mannered journalist is the same person as a powerful superhero." No wonder the statement surprises Lois.

Now consider organizing the information of the same author under different names. "Lewis Carrol = Charles Lutwidge Dodgson" conveys that a sense associated with the former name refers to the same person as the sense associated with the latter. In the bibliographic world, a sense that is associated with a personal name is mostly the bibliographic history recorded under that name. Therefore, the identity statement shows that an author of enigmatic children's fiction is identified to be the same person who is an author of mathematical books, conveying new information about that author.

In some cases, senses associated with names in name authority records potentially contain more personal information, and revealing identity between names may lead to a greater social impact. Consider an example of names that are associated with different genders. "George Eliot = Mary Anne Evans" carries more information than that the real name of the author of *Middlemarch* is Mary Anne Evans. When

different gender information is associated with each name, the identity statement

does more than combining two sets of bibliographic records since gender information

is loaded with stereotypes. In the case of George Eliot, the author herself revealed her

identity. But there are authors who want to keep their gender identity intact. There

are female writers who use male pseudonyms to avoid prejudices associated with

female authors, or male writers who use female pseudonyms to attract female readers.

For them, revealing their real names has a great impact on their career as writers.

There is no justifiable reason for catalogers to find out and reveal the "true gender"

of those authors by adding their real names to their name authority records.

When it comes to transgender people, what information should be included

in their name authority records carries even more serious ethical questions regarding

their identity. Name authority records often include authors' other names including

their legal and previous names. But including the birth names of transgender authors

would contain "outing" information that may harm them and put them in dangerous

situations. Such a risk would far outweigh the potential usefulness of that added

information.[3]

If Fregean senses of names are re-interpreted as information contained in name authority records, it is easy to see that each name authority record may carry social perceptions associated with any personal information included in the record as well as bibliographic information under the name as an access point. Such information should not be treated lightly.

Gender in Name Authority Records

As the philosophy of language interpretation of name authority information shows,

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[3] One thing this chapter does not discuss is a deceased person's identity. Adding a new "sense" to a deceased person's name authority record would not affect their on-going career or put them in imminent danger. But there is an ethical issue if a cataloger deviates from what a deceased person self-identified with by adding new information to their name authority record which the author could not possibly contest. There also is a separate question of whether or not it is appropriate to categorize a person belonging to a different era according to the current societal practices. This would require a separate discussion.

adding personal information to a name authority record could have an impact that is highly controversial. One good example for this is gender. Ever since RDA name authority control has been introduced, many concerns and critiques have been raised about the way the gender field (375) is included. This section reviews the criticism of the gender field and the PCC's response to these concerns by examining different definitions of "gender" including who determines one's gender, and the purpose of adding the gender field to name authority records.

"Gender" is one of the attributes of a person in name authority records. Some attributes (such as date of birth) never change, but other attributes (such as affiliation) may change over time. Whether or not the attribute "gender" changes depends on its definition. If, as in the Art and Architecture Thesaurus[4], "male" and "female" are defined as biological characteristics, then this attribute is not likely to change over time. When RDA authority records were first introduced, LC's

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[4] "Art and Architecture Thesaurus." accessed March 3, 2018,
http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabularies/aat

recommendation for the 375 field was to enter one of the two controlled terms: males

or females, or "not known."[5]  It was clearly assumed that "gender" is biological, binary

and objective.

Critiques of the 375 field primarily come from the view, as represented by

queer theory, that gender is socially constructed and fluid.[6]  It is most often assumed

that a person who is assigned a female sex at birth will have a female gender and most

likely perform "feminine" gender roles that are perceived in society as appropriate for

the female gender. But according to social constructionists, gender roles are forms of

behavior constructed through social negotiation in relation to specific historical and

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[5]  This is how LC instructed NACO catalogers during the training. See: Amber
Billey, Emily Drabinski, and K. R. Roberto, "What's Gender Got to Do with It? A
Critique of RDA 9.7," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2014): 412-
21.

[6]  Ibid.; Kelly J. Thompson, "More Than a Name: A Content Analysis of Name
Authority Records for Authors Who Self-Identify as Trans," *Library Resources &
Technical Services* 60, no. 3 (2016): 140-156.

cultural contexts and not something universal.[7] This view correlates with the idea

advanced by the feminist philosopher Judith Butler who argues that gender is

"performative." [8] From this perspective, when biological sex is considered

synonymous with gender, there is a leap of assumption that what is determined based

on one's physical appearance will be attached with socially and culturally constructed

roles. Further, when gender is understood as socially constructed and separated from

what is biological,[9] its binary system is also questioned.

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[7] Jeanne Marecek, Jeanne; Crawford, Mary; Popp, Danielle, "On the Construction

of Gender, Sex, and Sexualities." in *The Psychology of Gender*, ed. Alice H. Eagly,

Anne E Beall (New York: Guilford Press)192–216; Julie L. Nagoshi, Craig T.

Nagoshi, Stephen/ie Brzuzy, "Feminist and Queer Theories: The Response to the Social
Construction of Gender," in *Gender and Sexual Identity : Teanscending Feminist and
Queer Theory*. (New York: Springer, 2014)15-29.
[8] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.
[9] Many who hold gender constructionist views also consider biological sex as
socially constructed. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge,
2004)9-10; Marecek, Crawford, Popp, "On Construction of Gender, Sex, and
Sexualities," 205-207; Ash, "Not Your Mom's Trans101," Tranarchism(blog),
accessed April 3, 2018, http://www.tranarchism.com/2010/11/26/not-your-moms-

In addition, there were no clear guidelines about how to determine one's

gender. Catalogers often make their judgment based on unreliable "evidence" such

as names and photos of people. IFLA defines "gender" as "a gender by which the

person is identified."[10] This definition is ambiguous in that it is not clear who

identifies a person's gender. RDA9.7 defines "gender" as "a gender with which a

person identifies," thus indicating that a person self-identifies their gender(s). It is

important to make clear how this attribute is defined before determining how it

should be entered in a record.

The contrast between biological sex and socially constructed gender is

similar to the mutually exclusive views of biological race and socially constructed race.

trans-101/index.html.

[10] IFLA Working Goup on Functional Requirements and Numbering of Authority

Records (FRANAR), "Functional Requirements for Authority Data: A Conceptual

Model, accessed December 20, 2018.

https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/cataloguing/frad/frad_2013.pdf.

RDA name authority records do not have a specific field for a race/ethnic group,

perhaps because it could be highly controversial; although, such information can be

added in the 368 field and there have been discussions over how such an option

should be implemented.[11] Some critics of 375 fields suggest that RDA remove the

gender field altogether just as there is no race/ethnic group field.[12]

In response to this criticism, the PCC Ad Hoc Task Group on Gender in

Name Authority Records was formed and issued their report in October, 2016.[13]

The report includes recommendations on new vocabularies and best practices, offers

more options of terms, and makes clear that gender information is "what the person

self-identifies and explicitly discloses."[14] It also instructs to "[r]ecord dates associated

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[11] For example, it was discussed on PCC listserve: October 11-17, 2017.

[12] Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto. "What's Gender Got to do with It? A Critique of RDA 9.7."

[13] Amber Billey, Matthew Haugen, John Hostage, Nancy Sack, Adam L. Schiff, "Report of the PCC Ad Hoc Task Group on Gender in Name Authority Records," last modified October 4, 2016. https://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/documents/Gender_375%20field_RecommendationReport.pdf.

[14] Ibid., 2.

with a particular gender identity in subfield $s and $t only when the person explicitly provides them."[15]

The Task Group's suggestions are a vast improvement from the previous instructions. But they also open doors to complex issues such as understanding the fluid nature of gender identity and what counts as "explicit disclosure" when it comes to dates of gender transition.

In reality, it is rather rare for a transgender person to have a specific date of transition since many of them go through hormone therapies and multiple surgeries over the course of many years. But suppose there could be a specific date that a person publicly reveals. The report repeatedly mentions one's self identification and explicit disclosure as if they were essentially the same factor that determines one's identity. Of course, there is no way for catalogers to learn about what gender (or no gender) with which a person identifies unless it is publicly disclosed by that person. However, there may be discrepancies between what a person self-identifies with and what that

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[15] Ibid., 2.

person publicly discloses. One may self-identify as male for his entire life and start performing masculine gender roles far before his "public transition," but make his gender affirmation surgery date (assuming he only had one surgery) open to the public. Does "physical change" such as a surgery mark the time for a start of transition? Or does a social or legal recognition of a new gender marker such as what appears in official documents, e.g., one's passport, driver's license, or birth certificate determine the date of transition if the person explicitly discloses such dates? Just because a person has a surgery or has had their gender marker changed in official documents, that does not mean their identification as a certain gender starts at that point. Gender identity is extremely complex and each person has different levels of recognition as to what gender(s) they identify with. Transgender people's lived experience of their transitions vary, but few express a clear transitional point in terms of their self-perception. Some point out a gradual change of how others view them and the discrepancy between that and the change in how they perceive themselves,[16]

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[16]  Max Wolf Valerio, *The Testosterone Files : My Hormonal and Social Transformation*

and some express different modes of self-perception they go through during their

transitional period[17].

Adding gender information is particularly difficult when it comes to non-

binary or genderqueer people. These are the people who do not conform to the idea

of two genders. Some of them do not have a gender at all and some of them identify

with both genders, and there are yet others who move between two genders back and

forth.[18] These people clearly consider gender as a non-fixed characteristic that can

change in a fluid manner. If it is publicly stated that a person is non-binary, umbrella

terms such as "gender minorities" or "transgender people" can be applied in a name

authority record. But it is easily imaginable that in some cases, a non-binary person

is recorded as either male or female because the information about the gender(s) with

*from Female to Male* (Emeryville, CA : Seal Press, 2006) 144-150.

[17] Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl : A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (Emeryville, CA : Seal Press, 2007) 217.

[18] Christina Richards, Walter Pierre Bouman, Leighton Seal, Meg John Barker, Timo O. Nieder and Guy T'Sjoen, "Non-binary or Genderqueer Genders," *International Review of Psychiatry*. v. 28:1 (2016); Some of them identify with entirely new genders by creating new words that describe their genders. See: "Understanding Gender," Gender Spectrum, accessed April 3, 2018. https://www.genderspectrum.org/quick-links/understanding-gender/.

which this person identifies is not included in available sources. Because of this possibility, perhaps it is a good idea to instruct *not* to record one's gender unless it is clearly stated in reliable sources.

It may help to consider the purpose of adding gender information in name authority records. IFLA maps attributes to corresponding user tasks (find, identify, contextualize, justify) and "gender" is mapped to "identify."[19] In other words, gender information is needed to identify a person for the purpose of collocation. If so, in an extreme case, gender information should only be needed in a name authority record when there are two people with exactly the same name, birthday, and any other possible qualifiers and attributes, and gender information is the only thing that could separate them. But it seems that disambiguation of names is no longer the only purpose for adding more attributes. In a linked-data environment, name authority records contain rich biographical information that could be linked to other pieces of

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[19]  FRANAR, "Functional Requirement for Authority Data: A Conceptual Model," 47.

information. Adding another attribute such as gender will enable researchers to retrieve a list of works organized by that attribute.[20] In such an environment, it is easy to lose sight of what type of identity information is needed in the bibliographic world.

To understand how gender information may be interpreted differently depending on what type of identity information is desired, let us go back to the different levels of identity information mentioned in the beginning of this chapter: (a) how society as a whole perceives a person; (i) what appears on the person's official records and (ii) how the person is frequently viewed by other individuals, (b) the role a person plays in the specific literary or academic community, (c) how one perceives oneself. If a transgender person explicitly discloses a date when their gender marker is officially changed and that date is recorded as the date of transition regardless of how that person self-identifies (at different times), then the record falls under

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[20] Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto. "What's Gender Got to do with It? A Critique of RDA 9.7."419-420.

category (a)(i). Such a name authority record, although accurate in this specific

category of identity information, could be accused of being disrespectful to a person's

self-identity. Gender information from (a) (ii) comes from the way a person is viewed

and treated by most people (based on their appearance?) and such information would

be both unreliable and hard to evaluate, not to mention it does not correlate with

what gender a person self-identifies. If the identity information that name authority

records should include is category (b), then in most cases, gender information is not

necessary unless it is highly relevant to a person's works. It is extremely difficult to

achieve the accuracy of category (c) unless a person clearly and explicitly discloses

this information (and not just the dates of public changes) or catalogers directly

contact authors about their identities.[21]

What this chapter points out is that identity information in name authority

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[21]  Amelia Bowen Koford, "Engaging an Author in a Critical Reading of Subject
Headings," Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies 1, no. 1 (2017).
DOI: 10.24242/jclis.c1i1.20. In this article, Koford encourages librarians to
communicate with authors about their library records.

records should not be based on vague definitions and what is assumed to be a common understanding. To organize information, it should be first made clear what type of information is sought after and for what purpose. It is dangerous to start including personal information without first carefully considering and thoroughly discussing these fundamental issues.

In sum, recording highly personal information such as gender is a very difficult undertaking that may require both a great deal of effort and a high degree of sensitivity from catalogers. Technical service professionals need to pay attention to the kinds of critiques referenced here and give these issues the due concern they deserve. The Task Group's contribution to this issue has been of great utility, but to accommodate the problems posed by gender, endless further revisions may be necessary and it is questionable if doing so is worth such time and effort.

Conclusion

Name authority records with rich information are helpful both to users who search for specific authors' works and also to catalogers who organize bibliographic information and try to avoid creating duplicate or ambiguous records. The more attributes are added to a record, the fuller and more useful that record becomes. But adding more attributes could create new problems because a name authority record is not just a bundle of descriptions assigned to an access point; it contains personal information some of which is crucial to a person's identity. When gender was introduced as a new attribute of a person, some catalogers felt uncomfortable with the idea while others thought it was just adding another piece of information to records believing that more information would only be beneficial. These different perceptions come from different interpretations of what "gender" is. It should have been discussed and made clear from the beginning how this new attribute is defined and what consequences could follow when used in a certain way. This is not to suggest that the library community should decide on one definition of gender and stick to it no matter what (even if that may potentially harm some people). A record with

"accurate" information (in relation to a certain definition of an attribute) about a person is good only if it does not forcibly out or harm the person in the record.

Everyone would agree that ideal library records should be error free and contain accurate information. But accuracy of information may be relative to a type of information required in a specific context. Consideration of different levels of identity information may shed light on how certain information should or should not be included in name authority records. Philosophy of language interpretation of name authority records shows that information attached to a name is correlated with public knowledge and social perception of the person associated to that name and therefore, adding a new piece of information to the record potentially has a great social impact both on that person and society. Catalogers who create and edit name authority records therefore have tremendous responsibilities. This chapter aims to emphasize such potential social impacts name authority records carry and warns that there could always be different views and definitions that are important to the lives of some people and thus it is crucial for library professionals to engage in thorough discussions

and reviews before implementing any personal information in name authority records.

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