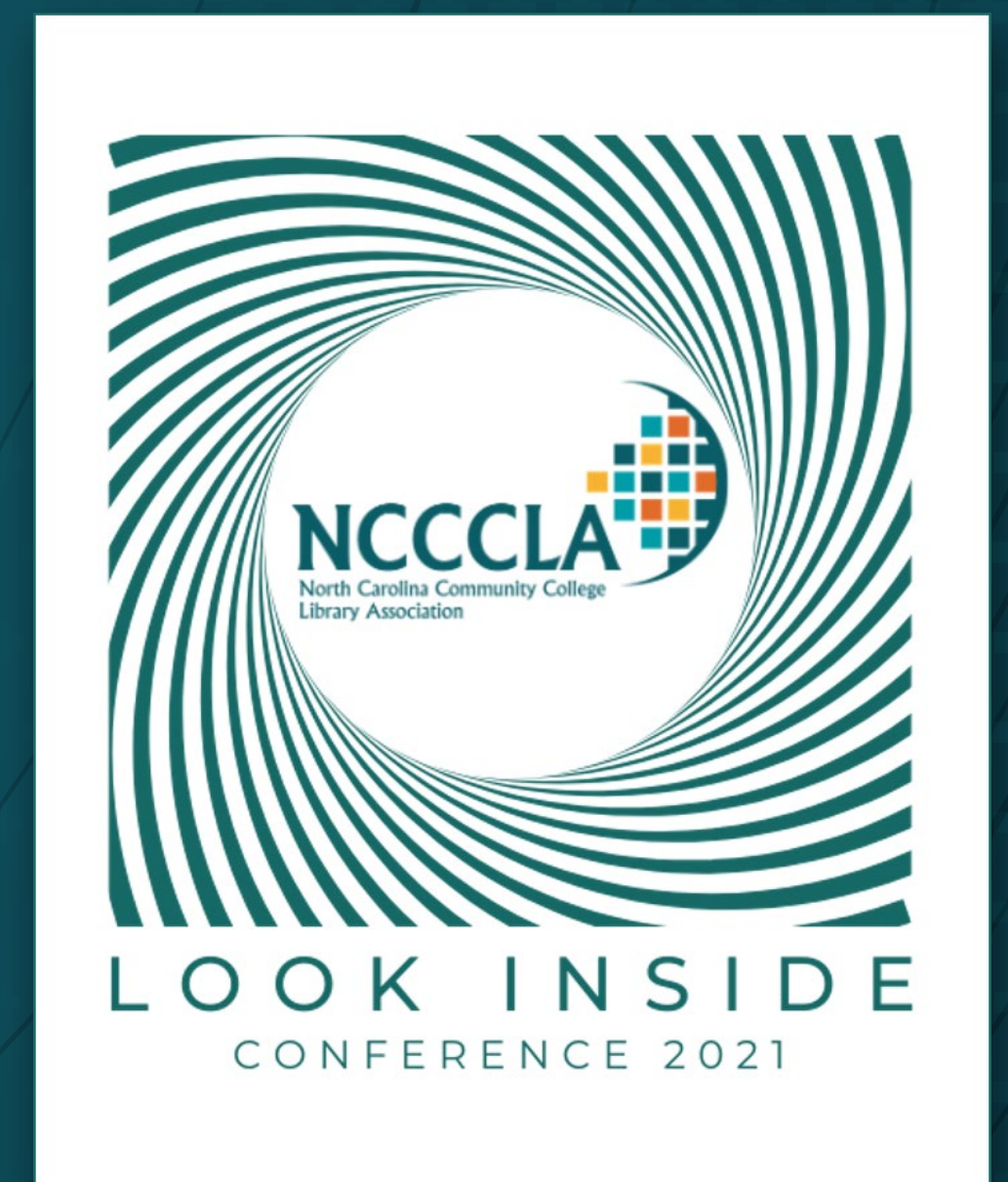


# Biases in library subject headings and classification systems

Presented by: Amanda Ros, Texas A&M University



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## About Me:

- Coordinator of Monograph Copy Cataloging at Texas A&M University
- Experience in academic libraries, public libraries, and as a project cataloger
- My professional interests are biases in cataloging and cataloging ethics
- Gulf Coast native
- My annual splurges are Aggie football season tickets and being in a New Orleans Mardi Gras krewe
- My other hobbies include playing board games and reading



# Introduction

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Cataloging and classification are critical to any library. Without them, finding materials would be impossible. However, there are biases that can result in patrons not getting the materials they need. Here are some examples:



# A well-known example:

## *“Illegal aliens”*

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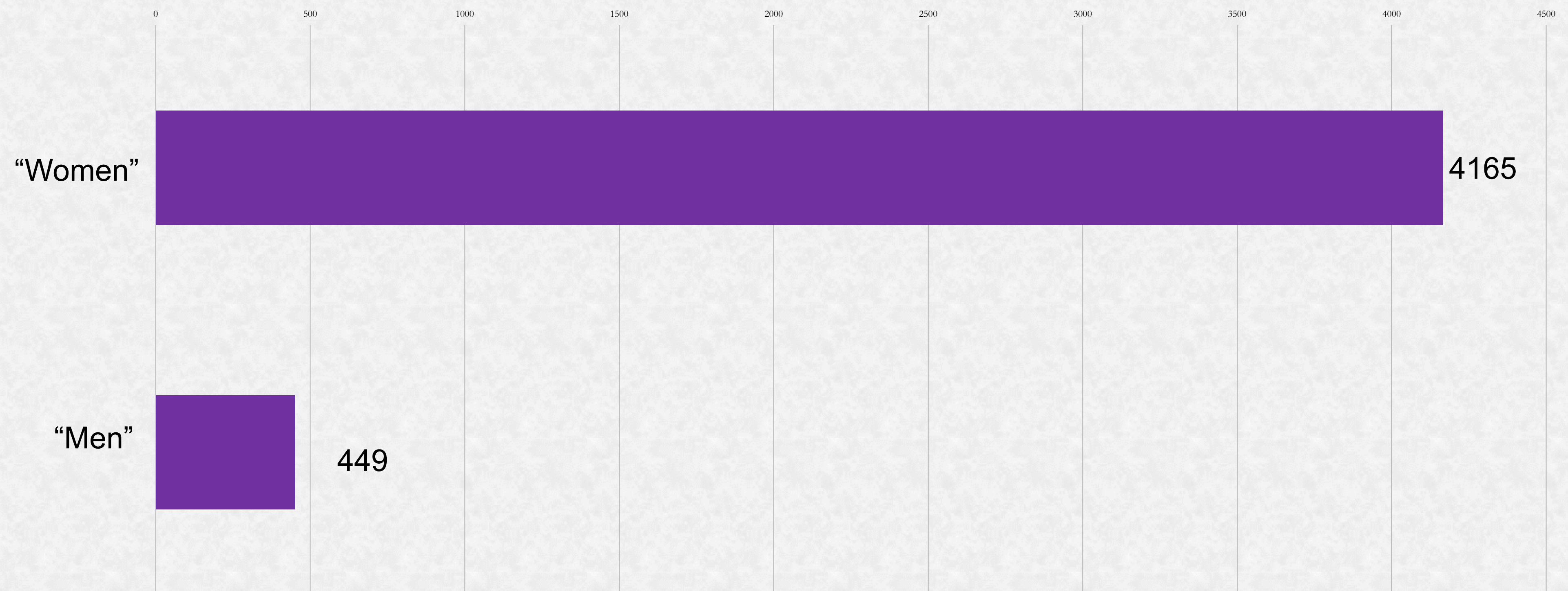
- On March 22, 2016 the Library of Congress announced that it was canceling the subject heading “**Illegal aliens**” in favor of “**Noncitizens**” and “**Unauthorized immigration**.”
- However, the decision was overturned a few months later, when the House of Representatives ordered the library to continue using the term “illegal alien.” They said they decided this in order to duplicate the language of federal laws written by Congress.
- This was the first time Congress ever intervened over a Library of Congress subject heading change. Even though many librarians and the American Library Association opposed Congress’s decision, “Illegal aliens” remains the authorized subject heading today.
- With President Biden’s proposal to replace “aliens” with “noncitizens” in federal immigration laws, there is hope and anticipation within the cataloging community that the Library of Congress subject heading change will occur



# “Straight White (American) Man” assumption

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## Subject Headings Comparison





African American women astronauts

Soviet Union

Women astronauts

Indian astronauts

# Astronauts

African American astronauts

United States



# **Librarians**

- \* Bisexual librarians
- \* Gay librarians
- \* Lesbian librarians
- \* Transgender librarians
- \* Transsexual librarians
- \* Women librarians



# Nurses

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- \* Female nurses
- \* Lesbian nurses

- \* Gay nurses
- \* Male nurses



# **Prostitutes**

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\* Male prostitutes

Sex workers (Broader term)



# Affirmative changes

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**African Americans or Blacks**

Afro-Americans      Negroes

**People with mental disabilities**

Mentally handicapped      Retarded persons



# Gender identity

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- HQ18.55 (General)
- HQ18.552 (Juvenile works)
- HQ1075 (The Family, Marriage, Women→ Sex Roles)
- BF692.2 (Psychology of Sex→Sex role, sex difference)



LGBTQIA subjects distinguished and classed under **Human sexuality. Sex.** rather than being grouped together under **Sexual deviants** (HQ70)

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- **Bisexuality** (HQ74-74.2)
- **Homosexuality. Lesbianism.** (HQ75-76.965)
- **Transvestism.** (HQ76.97-77.2)
- **Transsexualism.** (HQ77.7-77.95)
- **Transgenderism.** (HQ77.7-77.9)
- **Intersex people. Intersexuality.** (HQ77.97-78.2)
- **Asexuality (Sexual orientation)** (HQ21)



# Call numbers

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The Family, Marriage, Women

- **Men**
  - HQ1088-1090.7
  - 4 areas (Study and teaching, General, Aesthetics, Regional)
- **Women. Feminism**
  - HQ1101-2030.7
  - 22 areas



# The Classification Dilemma

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- Many items cover multiple subjects
- A single physical item can only be shelved in 1 location
- Selecting a call number automatically “devalues” other subjects



# Where would you class the book?

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*Women of the Depression: Caste and Culture in San Antonio, 1929-1939?*

- Women's history?
- Depression of 1929?
- San Antonio history?
- somewhere else?



# **Answer:**

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**HQ1439.S2**

**The Family. Marriage. Woman—Women.  
Feminism—By region or country—America—  
United States—By city, A-Z**



# The Cutt[er]ing Problem

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## The N4 Problem

- The task of updating subject headings is simple with batch editing or OCLC record updates
- Updating the Cutter number requires more effort and resources
  - Possibly needing to pull the item(s) from the stacks
  - Using Cutter tables and shelflisting to ensure that the item is not duplicating another call number and will be in the correct place on the shelf
  - Updating call number fields in the bibliographic, holdings, and/or item records
  - Updating the physical piece will require labeling supplies
  - Reshelving may require shifting in the stacks



# The Cutt[er]ing Problem

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*Soul liberty: the evolution of Black religious politics in postemancipation Virginia*

- African American churches—Virginia—History—19th century.
- African American churches—Political activity—Virginia.
- African American Christians—Virginia—History—19th century.
- African American Christians—Political activity—Virginia.
- Slaves—Emancipation—Virginia.
- Virginia—Politics and government—1865-1950

BR

563

.N4

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2020



# Resources and References

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# Thank you!

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