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KNOWLEDGE ORGANIZATION IN A DANGEROUS TIME

Abstract

Knowledge organization (KO) work is both critical and risky in the context of rising fascism, creating tools that support both discovery and censorship. Contemporary approaches require knowing how our design work contributes to either outcome. In this panel, we will apply our collective expertise in critique and design of knowledge organization to explore ethical approaches to KO work in dangerous times.

Topic

Knowledge organization work is both critical and risky in the context of rising fascism. Labelling and categorization can enable vital connections within vulnerable communities, connecting us with the resources that will keep us alive, reaffirm our shared humanity, and shed light on injustices. The same infrastructure can, conversely, enable programs of censorship and eugenics, providing efficiency and an appearance of objectivity to projects that select which resources are not fit for public view and make judgements on who counts as a person. For example, the same tools that allow a reader to identify works written on trans experiences allow transphobic projects to generate lists for public library book challenges.

The assembled panel are experts in the field of knowledge organization (KO), spanning library classifications and controlled vocabularies, user-generated subject indexing, and community-centered metadata schemas through both critique and design. We have studied the ways that these infrastructures have been tools of violence, resistance, and resurgence.

Each of our panelists will introduce their perspective on the following questions, grounded in their particular expertise and past projects:

- What experiences or projects have illustrated to you the power of KO to heal or repair injustices? What best illustrates to you the power of KO to harm or exacerbate injustices?

- What does “critical refusal” (Garcia et al., 2022) look like in knowledge organization work? When should we forgo knowledge organization work?
- What should education for KO in dangerous times entail?

After these short remarks, we will engage the audience through these questions and open up the floor for further dialogue. In the context of CAIS, our community can produce further examples, case studies, and prioritize areas of further investigation and intervention for our field.

Panelists (alphabetical order)

Melissa Adler

Melissa Adler is an Associate Professor and Graduate Chair in the Faculty of Information & Media Studies at Western University. Her research examines knowledge organization and state power and the paradoxes inherent to facilitating access to information. Her book, *Cruising the Library* examines the history of sexuality through the lens of Library of Congress classifications. She has two books on Thomas Jefferson and the history of information due to be published in the coming year: *Peculiar Satisfaction: Thomas Jefferson and the Mastery of Subjects* and *Surveillance and Security in the “Empire of Liberty”*.

Stacy Allison-Cassin

Stacy Allison-Cassin is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Information Science at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada, Stacy engages in research related to linked data, and metadata and issues related to equity and justice. Stacy is the co-lead of the Respectful Terminology Platform Project and is currently the chair for the Teaching and Learning community and a member of council of the National Indigenous Knowledge and Language Association, and Indigenous-led association centered in Canada and sits several advisory bodies. A Citizen of the Métis Nation of Ontario, Stacy has with kinship connections to the Georgian Bay Métis community.

Julia Bullard

Julia Bullard is an Assistant Professor at the School of Information, where teaches information organization, metadata, and radical information work. Her research examines how metadata and vocabulary design (mis)represents communities and their materials. Her current projects focus on how community organizations create and sustain their own specialized vocabularies. She serves on the board of the Canadian Association for Information Science and the Subject Analysis and Access standing committee of International Federation of Library Associations.

Sharon Farnel

Sharon Farnel (MLIS, PhD) is a settler who lives and works in Amiskwacîwâskahikan, also known as Edmonton, located in Treaty 6 and Metis Territory. She is Head, Metadata Strategies at the University of Alberta Library, and since 2014 has been working with collaborators in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region on community-driven knowledge organization and resource

description for their digital library. Her professional, research, and teaching focus on community-driven knowledge organization, reparative descriptive standards and practices, and linked and open metadata.

Ali Shiri

Ali Shiri is a Professor at the School of Library and Information Studies and Vice Dean, Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, University of Alberta. Ali has been teaching, researching, and writing about cultural heritage digital libraries and repositories, digital information interaction, data and learning analytics, and more recently ethical considerations in the use of generative AI in graduate education.

References

Garcia, P., Sutherland, T., Salehi, N., Cifor, M., & Singh, A. (2022). No! Re-imagining Data Practices Through the Lens of Critical Refusal. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 6(CSCW2), 315:1-315:20. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3557997>