

# Male Homosexuality in Brazilian Indexing Languages: Some Ethical Questions

Fabio Assis Pinho\* and José Augusto Chaves Guimarães\*\*

\*Associate Professor, Department of Information Science, Federal University of Pernambuco – UFPE, Av. da Arquitetura s/n – Recife (50740-550) – Pernambuco – Brazil,  
<fabio@ufpe.br>

\*\*Professor, Department of Information Science, São Paulo State University – UNESP,  
Av. Higyno Muzzi Filho, 737, Marília (17525-900) – São Paulo – Brazil,  
<guima@marilia.unesp.br>

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Fabio Assis Pinho is an Associate Professor in the Department of Information Science at the Federal University of Pernambuco, Recife-PE, Brazil. He received his Master's in Information Science in 2006 and his Ph.D. in Information Science in 2010, both from the São Paulo State University, Marília-SP, Brazil. His research interests lie in the broad area of knowledge organization and representation, especially the ethical issues in knowledge organization. His CV is available at: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/4220711855480007>



José Augusto Chaves Guimarães has a bachelor's degree in Library Science (São Paulo State University, 1981), bachelor's degree in Law (Eurípides Soares da Rocha Foundation, 1982), MSc in Communication Science (University of São Paulo, 1989), and a PhD in Information Science (University of São Paulo, 1994), and has done post-doctoral studies in Documentation (Universidad Carlos III of Madrid, 2008). He is a Professor at the Library Science Graduate School of São Paulo State University and former president of the Brazilian Chapter of ISKO (2007-2011). Research areas include: knowledge organization, diplomatics, domain analysis, and epistemology of IS. His CV is available at: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/6380929054652063>



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**ABSTRACT:** Studies on ethics in information organization have deeply contributed to the recognition of the social dimension of Information Science. The subject approach to information is linked to an ethical dimension because one of its major concerns is related to its reliability and usefulness in a specific discursive community or knowledge domain. In this direction, we propose, through an exploratory research design with qualitative and inductive characteristics, to identify the specific terminology that Brazilian indexing languages allow for terms relating to male homosexuality. We also analyzed the terms assigned to papers published in the *Journal of Homosexuality*, *Sexualities* and *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health* between the years 2005 to 2009. From this analysis of terms and the Brazilian indexing languages, we see (1) the Brazilian context, (2) imprecision in the terminology, (3) indications of prejudices disseminated by political correctness, (4) biased representation of the subject matter, (5) and the presence of figures of speech.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Knowledge organization is an everyday professional practice, but one that has the potential for powerful social messaging. Day by day, knowledge organization as a discipline turns to the social dimension of the area and its impacts on users, and consequently the role performed by the professional.<sup>1</sup> In this context, the information professional is required to act ethically, especially since their work is evaluated by how well it serves a particular community or group (López-Huertas 2008).<sup>2</sup>

Based on this context, the topic of this paper is established: the ethical aspects in the representation of knowledge, particularly regarding precision. We understand that the process, the instruments, and the products of representation are not neutral, since their creators impose a particular point of view that reflects ideological and political positions (Guimarães 2006). As a result, biases in the representation of knowledge are real, and, due to this reason, we need to identify the values involved, since they guide the activity of those who work in knowledge organization (Guimarães et al. 2008).

Nevertheless, what are these biases? The term *bias* is sometimes used to designate some occurrence of prejudice; its meaning, according to Hornby (1995, 104), is “an opinion or feeling that strongly favors one of the sides in an argument or something in a group, sometimes unfairly; a prejudice disseminated by ‘political correctness’.” In other words, the comprehension of the term “bias” in English refers to a general influence on something or somebody. In Portuguese, bias is translated into tendency, inclination, and also prejudice. The deviations of senses could be also highlighted; these are many, according to Houaiss (2001, 1021-1022), for instance: “a change in the path, the direction or normal position ... distancing from the patterns ... any type of escaping from the normal patterns.” In this way, deviations are considered escaping or changes from what is known as normal.

Thus the understanding of bias as a deviation concerns the sense that, when activities or products are constituted having a tendency or a dominant view—a feeling that overcomes (also jeopardizing) others—it is implied that this activity or product must represent a change or escape from equal treatment. This understanding is based on the explanation that Hjørland (2008, 256) gives about bias, concerning knowledge organization: “it is normally understood as a word with a negative connotation, as something that

must be avoided or minimized” that means something that must be changed and, consequently, is devious.

To clearly identify this matter, the topic “male homosexuality” is used in this paper. Concerning this topic, it can be said that the literary production still does not have an adequate documentary representation, due to the lack of a controlled vocabulary used in this domain; neither is there vocabulary standardization that provides a satisfactory indexing of documents about the topic. In this case, the use of a standardized language facilitates users’ search and also allows a greater precision. The librarians establish labels when indexing in order to look for substitutes for knowledge; most of the time they are influenced by subjectivity. Certainly, this action is based on a cultural and ideological context, and that is why librarians are vulnerable in that their personal beliefs interfere with the representation of knowledge that is being analyzed in that moment (Pinho 2006, Pinho 2010, Milani 2010).

Thus the paper will focus on this matter: the ethical aspects of representation of knowledge regarding male homosexuality. The matter of male homosexuality constitutes a domain of knowledge that is materialized through a scholarly terminology. Our work uses the domain analysis approach proposed by Hjørland and Albrechtsen (1995) and Hjørland (2002). Domain analysis uncovers information recorded and socialized—by a knowledge domain as a whole, or of a specific discursive community within that domain. Our study is a terminological study, one of eleven approaches outlined in Hjørland (2002). We also take into consideration the Communicative Theory of Terminology (CTT) by Cabré (2005), since terminology is dedicated to the observation of the term’s behavior and its relation to scientific knowledge, and, in this manner, points out theoretical elements and practical principles capable of guiding the search, the selection, and the ordering of terms from that knowledge domain. Male homosexuality was chosen because if other topics were approached, it would result in an excessive elongation of domain; consequently, it would bring some damage to the analysis, due to the lack of specificity. In this way, terms such as lesbianism were excluded from our study.

As pointed out by López-Huertas (2008) and Ibekwe SanJuan and SanJuan (2010), ethical studies on information organization can be considered one of the most increasing research subjects in LIS nowadays. In this sense, this topic is current and is investigated by many researchers from different countries (Beall 1980,

Dahlberg 1992, Hudon 1997, Leblond 1999, Arot 2000, Rafferty 2001, Begthol 2002, Begthol 2005, Fernández-Molina and Guimarães 2002, García-Gutiérrez 2002, Olson 2000, Olson 2002, Olson 2003, Van der Waalt 2002, Guimarães and Fernández-Molina 2003, Sigel 2004, Thellefsen and Thellefsen 2004, Bair 2005, Guimarães et al. 2005, Guimarães et al. 2008, Guimarães et al. 2009, Guimarães 2006, Pinho 2006, Guimarães and Pinho 2007, Guimarães and Pinho 2008, Guimarães, Milani and Pinho 2008, Milani 2010 and others). In a more specific approach, the ethical dimension of information organization of subjects related to homosexuality have been studied in the literature (Berman 1971, Greenblatt 1990, Silva 2003, Christensen 2008, Keilty 2009, Pinho 2010, Martínez-Ávila, Fox and Olson 2011).

In the North American context,<sup>3</sup> there are many euphemisms to designate the male homosexual with feminine characteristics, such as *butterfly*, *sissy*, *campy*, *cupcake*, *degenerate*, *effeminate*, *fag*, *faggot*, *freak*, etc. These examples demonstrate the negative connotations that the expressions or words have, then in many cases it is impossible to separate the euphemisms from the dysphemisms (those terms with negative connotations), because they are all constructed in a particular context at a particular time, in this way what is a euphemism nowadays can be a dysphemism in the future.

We understand, then, that the terminology comes from natural language, combined with data from scholarly documents in order to deal with a specialized meaning. Because of this the specialized meaning of terminology is based on the words of that domain, materialized through the functional register of the thematic base (Cabré 1995, 7). Regarding the application of terminology, Cabré (1995, 12) explains that it serves the purposes of representation and the transference. In the representation functional, terminology serves to some areas such as documentation and linguistic engineering. In these cases its objectives concern the organization of the terminographical organization. In relation to the documentation, the terminology is a key element to represent the content of documents and to access them. In the transference function, the terminology serves mainly to the direct communication, to the communicative mediation and to the linguistic planning.

The study of figures of speech in the universe of male homosexuality directed to knowledge representation takes into account the identification of its linguistic system and its lexicon, which results in terminological sets, since they will be utilized by that

community/subculture, not only in day-by-day discourse but also in the scientific literature.

### 3.0 Methodology

This work has an exploratory nature by means of both qualitative and quantitative analysis applied in a corpus composed of keywords extracted from three international academic journals on male homosexuality (*Journal of Homosexuality*, *Sexuality*, and *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Mental Health*, between 2005 and 2009, comprising 1,705 keywords from 519 papers. From the original corpus, 93 keywords were selected because they are directly connected to the male homosexual's universe.

The 93 selected keywords were then compared to the descriptors extracted from three most comprehensive Brazilian indexing languages (*Federal Senate Basic Subject Headings- FSSH*, *University of São Paulo Subject Headings-USPSH*, and *Brazilian National Library Subject Terminology-BNLSH*), which are available online in order to identify the subject specificity that could be reached by the three different indexing languages in comparison to the selected keywords.

### 4.0 Data analysis

The comparison between the selected keywords and the correspondent subject headings in every indexing language analyzed can be exemplified in the following table. The keywords and subject headings are presented in the original Portuguese form followed by the English translation:

Keywords	FSSH	USPSH	BNLSH
<i>Armário</i> (Closet)	-	-	-
<i>Assumir-se</i> (Coming out)	-	-	<i>Homosexualidade assumida</i> (Assumed homosexuality)
<i>Bareback</i>	<i>Comportamento sexual</i> (sexual behavior)	-	-
<i>BDSM</i> (Bondage, Discipline, Sadism and Masochism)	-	-	<i>Sadomasoquismo</i> (sadomasochism)
<i>Bispos gays</i> (Gay Bishops)	-	-	<i>Ordenação de homossexuais</i> (Ordination of homosexuals)

Keywords	FSSH	USPSH	BNLSH
<i>Casamento gay</i> (Gay marriage)	-	<i>União Civil de Pessoas do Mesmo Sexo</i> (Same-sex civil union)	<i>Casamento entre homossexuais</i> (Wedding between homosexuals)
<i>Comunidade gay</i> (Gay community)	-	<i>Homossexualidade Aspectos sociais</i> (Homosexuality – social aspects)	-
<i>Coro gay</i> (Gay chorus)	-	-	-
<i>Couro</i> (Leather)	-	-	-
<i>Cross-dresser</i>	-	-	<i>Travestis</i> (Travestite)
<i>Cruising</i>	-	-	-
<i>Dogging</i>	-	-	-
<i>Dois espíritos</i> (Two spirits)	-	-	-
<i>Drag Queen</i>	-	-	<i>Travestis</i> (Travestite)
<i>Fag hag</i>	-	-	-
<i>Frango</i> (Chicken)	-	-	<i>Jovens homossexuais</i> (Yong homosexuals)
<i>Gay</i>	<i>Homossexualismo masculino</i> (Male Homosexuality)	<i>Homossexuais – masculino</i> (Male Homosexuality)	<i>Homossexuais masculinos</i> (Male homosexuals)
<i>Lolito</i> (Dude)	-	-	<i>Jovens homossexuais</i> (Youth homosexuals)
<i>Não pergunta, Não fale</i> (Don't ask, don't talk)	-	-	-
<i>Queer</i>	-	-	<i>Teoria Queer</i> (Queer theory)
<i>Ursos</i> (Bears)	-	-	-

Table 1. Selected list of keywords on male homosexuality compared to the Brazilian indexing languages.

An overview of the corpus suggests that the indexing languages analyzed are still not specific enough to represent the subjects on male homosexuality. Some factors can be pointed out for this situation:

The Brazilian National Library Subject Headings List is based on the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* and this is a prime factor to understand why

reached a more specific subject representation because the *corpus* was composed of terms that came from English language scientific journals. So, both the keywords and the subject headings come from the same linguistic culture. However, that did not happen to all the situations because sometimes the translation from English to Portuguese needed some cultural adaptations (Hudon 1997), as it happened in these cases: *dude* to *lolito*,<sup>4</sup> *dogging* to *banheirão* (Big bathroom, in English), *cruising* to *caçar* (To hunt, in English), and *bareback* to *sexo sem proteção* (Unprotected sex, in English).

If in one hand, the term *gay* is deeply accepted by the discursive community, also because its use is intimately connected to the fights for the acknowledgement of this subculture, and the term *homosexual* presents a pejorative sense that comes from the medical context as a primary distinction through the sexuality. On the other hand, in the Brazilian context occurs the opposite, because the term *gay* has a pejorative connotation and the indexing languages' use of *homosexual* instead of *gay*. Such a situation can be observed through the fact that keywords that carry *gay* as a qualifier correspond to *homosexual* in the indexing language or even does not have a correspondent. It shows that the term *gay* has an euphemistic sense in English although it carries a dysphemistic sense in Brazilian Portuguese, where the term *homosexual* has an orthophemic character what confirms the observations of Hudon (1997).

The low subject specificity of the Brazilian indexing languages could be observed by the fact that 29 of them (31.18%) tended to have a general term so that they could be represented, resulting in a loss of precision.

The presence of terms like *Efeminação* (Effeminacy, in English), *Efeminofobia* (Effeminaphobia, in English), *Pederastia* (Pederasty, in English) e *Sodomia* (Sodomy, in English) in the indexing languages will need explanations and correct directing (by means of more detailed scope notes, for instance) because sometimes they can be object of an inadequate sense, caused by the discrimination. On the other hand, the occurrence of the terms *Amor homoerótico* (homoerotic love) and *Relacionamento romântico entre o mesmo sexo* (Romantic relationship between people of the same sex), as synonyms in the indexing languages (USE/USED FOR), reveal an important aspect of the homosexuality, so far just considered the simple sexual relationship between people of the same sex. The term *Homossexualidade* (Homosexuality) appears only in one indexing language – *USPSH* – although the FSSH

and the BNLSH provide the term *Homossexualismo* (Homosexualism) whose suffix refers to a pathology. This is a typical case of ethical problem that must be solved in the indexing languages' policy.

Although some acronyms such as GLBT and LGBT reflect the identity of the studied subculture, they have not been incorporated by the indexing languages. The mentioned acronyms are highly comprehensive (gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transvestites, transsexuals and intersexes) and their change and enhancement demonstrate the complexity and specificity of the subject that is not restricted only to the label homosexuality.

Metaphors like *Armário* (Closet, in English), *Assumir-se* (Coming out, in English), *Bareback*, *Couro* (Leather, in English), *Cruising*, *Dogging*, *Dois espíritos* (Two Spirits, in English), *Fag bag*, *Frango* (Chicken, in English), *Lolito*, *Não pergunte Não fale* (Don't ask, don't tell, in English) and *Ursos* (Bears, in English) did not have any correspondent term in the subject headings analyzed what confirms the lack of specificity in the analyzed indexing languages.

## 5.0 Conclusion

The results show that Brazilian indexing languages do not offer enough precision to represent specifically male homosexuality's topics. Moreover, the lack of terminological control is perceived in terms like *gay* and *homosexual* as well as the use of the qualifier *people of the same sex*. Furthermore, it was seen that some terms are figures of speech whose meanings were reconsidered in order to minimize a hostile environment; for instance, *gay* and *queer* that were originally pejorative terms, nowadays are accepted as favorable terms.

The results also convey terminological imprecision in Brazilian indexing languages (sometimes demanding an "approximation of meaning") like prejudices, artificial terminology imposed by the 'political correctness' movement (as a result of forces of tension), biased representation (including inappropriate and sometimes inaccurate representation) and the presence of figures of speech underlying the discourse community (reflected in the assigned papers' keywords) that are not supported by the indexing languages analyzed.

A third aspect to highlight is the fact that subjects related to male homosexuality are not properly structured in these languages, because there are so few terms to represent this domain, thus leading to very general, and as a consequence inaccurate, representations.

To sum up, the observed need of approximation of meanings (for cultural reasons), the lack of precision,

and the fact that figures of speech that are underlying the discursive community do not find support in the Brazilian indexing languages analyzed can jeopardize the information retrieval for the users interested in the analyzed topic. Such a situation suggests the need of further research in order to establish a basic set of subject headings on male homosexuality which can be suitable to the specificity of the academic literature.

## Notes

1. López-Huertas (2008) presents research in knowledge organization, giving special attention to social matters.
2. It is highlighted here the semantic power or the term suitability, using the vestment metaphor, demonstrating the adequacy aspect.
3. Based mainly in Holder (2002).
4. An adjective derived from the female name *Lolita*, meaning a man with delicate and childlike behavior or appearance.

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