

# Changing Depictions of Persons in Library Practice: Spirits, Pseudonyms, and Human Books†

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Dobreski, Brian and Barbara Kwaśnik. 2017. "Changing Depictions of Persons in Library Practice: Spirits, Pseudonyms, and Human Books." *Knowledge Organization* 44(8): 656-667. 25 references.



**Abstract:** Among knowledge organizing institutions, libraries have a rich history of depicting persons as information. From personal authority records to descriptions of oral history interviews, libraries have amassed data on persons from a variety of perspectives. Within this set of traditions, however, subtle but significant shifts in practice and conception have occurred, particularly concerning how persons are interpreted and depicted and how such depictions are justified. To explore these issues, we looked to four specific library traditions: authority work, community information, oral history, and "human library" events. Within these traditions, we identified six standards guiding the representation of persons. We performed a content analysis of these standards, along with a semantic alignment and comparison of descriptive elements. From this analysis, we reconstructed an historical timeline and a set of narratives capturing changing definitions of people, a shifting focus from names to identities, and an increasing acceptance of varied sources of justification. Findings show not only a number of critical variations within library practices but also practical and ethical issues concerning the responsibility of libraries as well as the redistribution and reuse of library data on the web.

Received: 18 September 2017; Accepted: 18 September 2017

Keywords: library, persons, authority information, standards, human representation

† Paper presented at ISKO-UK: Knowledge Organization, What's the Story? ISKO-UK Biennial Conference, 11-12 September, Canada Water Library & Culture Space, London, UK. The authors wish to thank G. Dale Vargason for his willingness to serve as an example and his assistance in preparing these representations. The authors also thank Yun Huang for her input in the initial development of this study and the reviewers for valuable suggestions.

## 1.0 Introduction

Libraries have amassed data on personal entities in a variety of ways and from a variety of perspectives. In fact, representing humans is so ubiquitous and taken for granted that it is possible to overlook the rich implications of how these practices developed and evolved over time. The norms surrounding the representation of personal entities a century ago were not the same as today's norms, even though superficially it may seem little has changed. Similarly, a "person" represented as the author in a bibliographic record may not be construed as the same "per-

son" as the one participating in an oral history interview, even if they are in fact the same human being. Thus, even concurrent practices of human representation in libraries can differ significantly, resulting in completely separate systems of personal records with distinct perspectives. The very notion of who or what can be a "person" has also differed over time and across practices. We argue that these differences and changes reflect larger shifts in both attitudes and technologies.

One critical source of evidence for shifting practices and attitudes can be found in standards, because standards distill and bring order to practice. We start with the

assumption that every standard has a story. As we trace the narratives and look more deeply into the standards that have guided practice we can also comment on people’s importance as “pieces of data” in any knowledge-representation endeavor. In pursuing this, the following questions are especially relevant: How have libraries construed the notion of a “person” over time? In what ways have libraries represented people and information about them? Over time, what practices or perspectives have persisted, and where and when have shifts taken place? Finally, what have been viewed as the sources of authority in determining information about people?

In this study, we performed a content analysis of selected standards used for the representation of persons within Anglo-American library traditions of knowledge organization, including authority work, oral history, community information, and “human library” events. From this analysis, we reconstructed an historical timeline and set of narratives capturing changing definitions and depictions of people and information about them and the function this information has played in the various standards governing knowledge representation. Findings reveal a number of critical variations within library practices concerning the representation of persons, as well as practical and ethical issues concerning the responsibility of libraries and the reuse of library data.

## 2.0 Approach

The task of analyzing how libraries have represented personal entities is complicated, because the notion of a “person” is multifaceted and dependent on many factors. Depending on the goal, the information embedded in any representation may vary in perspective and detail. For example, a person being represented as an author of a book entails a particular set of data and point of view, while

the same person represented as a community service provider will entail something else. Though authority work in cataloging is an obvious example of libraries representing persons, we also looked beyond this tradition to other practices in order to accumulate a variety of perspectives. While not an exhaustive list, we aimed for a diverse and representative range of situations in which libraries are called upon to publicly represent people: authority work in cataloging, community information, oral histories, and “human library” events.

As mentioned, work within each of these traditions is facilitated by standards that compile a set of specific practices, values, and norms, and express them in abstract form. While traditions such as authority work have been guided by a number of information standards, other traditions such as “human libraries” make use of relatively few. For each tradition, we tried to choose *de facto* or representative standards intended for practical use. We selected a total of six standards: three for authority work and one each for community information, oral histories, and “human libraries.” These six standards cover a time-span of fifty years and represent a variety of perspectives. Each of them, as well as important related documents, are detailed below and visualized in Figure 1.

### 2.1 Traditions and sources

The areas we chose represent library practices that incorporate the representation of persons as an important, rather than an incidental, component. Among them, authority work, in which authors and other persons associated with bibliographic resources are identified and differentiated from each other, is the oldest and most ubiquitous of the examined traditions. As such, we chose three different descriptive standards for analysis: *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules (AACR)*, *Anglo-American Cata-*

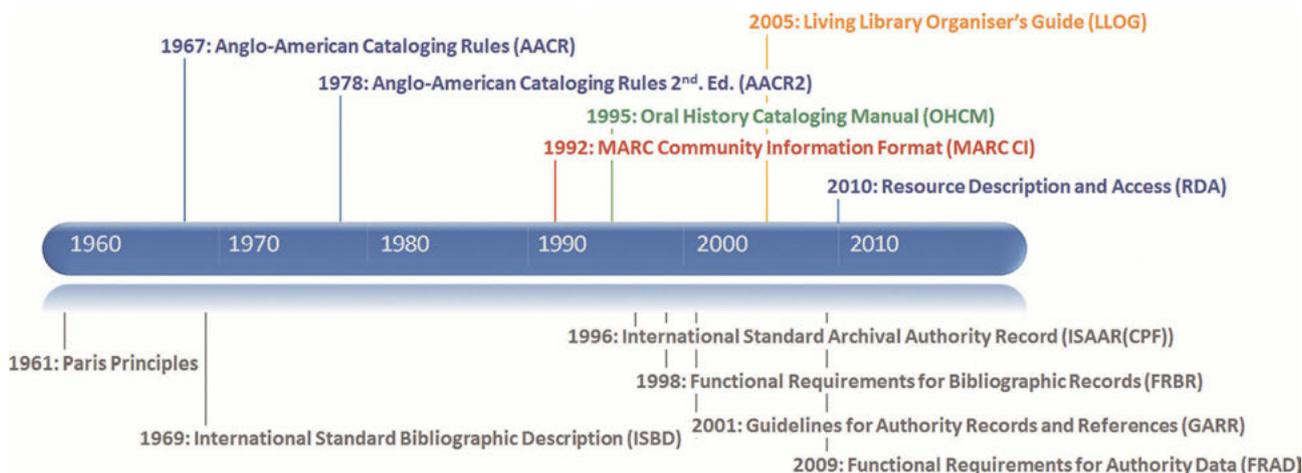


Figure 1. Timeline of examined standards and related standards.

loguing Rules 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (*AACR2*), and Resource Description and Access (RDA). Community information practices see libraries providing information about community experts and services. We chose the MARC Community Information Format (MARC CI) as the corresponding standard for examination. Oral history projects occur in a number of cultural heritage institutions; in libraries, practices have been strongly influenced by the *Oral History Cataloging Manual* (OHCM) (Matters 1995). Finally, “human library” events present persons as “books” to be “checked out” and conversed with. This is the most recent of the examined traditions, and the associated formal standard is the *Living Library Organiser’s Guide* (LLOG). These six standards do not stand independently, but rather are interrelated with each other as well as with other influential standards and documents in important ways. We briefly review each of the six standards and their connections below.

### 2.1.1 *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* (1967)

Descriptive catalog codes are compilations of rules guiding the creation of cataloging records to represent library resources. Within these general rules, the task of representing people is twofold: first to provide guidelines for which persons to choose for representation, and second, the establishment of a preferred form for representing them. Together, these functions create headings or access points—names or titles chosen as important indexing terms for a library resource. Typical access points might include the names of authors, editors, illustrators, translators, composers, artists, and so on. The construction and maintenance of records concerning these names and the persons they are meant to represent is referred to as authority control. In Anglo-American libraries, there have been relatively few widely adopted descriptive catalog codes, with a trend toward international standardization (Dunkin 1969). This trend is apparent in the 1967 publication of the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* (*AACR*), a joint project among American, British, and Canadian library associations, with the intent of standardizing library cataloging across a number of English-speaking countries. In the United States, *AACR* superseded previous descriptive standards while differing from them in important ways. Chief amongst these was an intentional focus on principle-based cataloging, with significant inspiration concerning headings and authority work coming from the IFLA-sponsored Paris Principles (1971), a document meant to guide international harmonization of heading practices. The influence of the Paris Principles can be seen in the first of *AACR*’s three major parts, which concerns the selection and formation of headings, including those for persons.

### 2.1.2 *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (1978)

Subsequent to the publication of *AACR*, another IFLA-sponsored endeavor, the 1969 International Meeting of Cataloguing Experts, laid the groundwork for the International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD), a framework designed to establish consistency in the content and order of bibliographic descriptions (Gorman 2003). In 1978, a new edition of *AACR*, the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (*AACR2*) was prepared in order to incorporate the ISBD framework. *AACR2* became the predominant cataloging code in American, British, Canadian, and Australian libraries for a span of roughly thirty-five years, guiding the creation of vast amounts of bibliographic and authority data. *AACR2* is divided into two major parts, with the second part covering formation and usage of headings. Despite some significant differences between the two standards, the scope and coverage of *AACR2*’s rules concerning personal authority data is generally similar to *AACR*, and retains inspiration from the Paris Principles. One important departure may be the increased authority given to information found in resources associated with a person, as opposed to information found in general reference resources. Similar to its predecessor, *AACR2* was designed chiefly for physical card catalogs, and subsequent revisions over the years did little to keep the standard abreast of the quickly changing technological landscape (Coyle and Hillmann 2007).

### 2.1.3 *Resource Description and Access* (2010)

In the intervening years between *AACR2* and its 2010 successor, Resource Description and Access (RDA), a number of important developments would influence library cataloging, including the adoption of automated library systems and the proliferation of the web. Regarding personal authority data, several significant standards would be released during this time as well, including *Guidelines for Authority Records and References* (*GARR*) and International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons, and Families (*ISAAR* (CPF)). Of most importance for RDA, however, would be *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records* (FRBR) and *Functional Requirements for Authority Data* (FRAD), conceptual models of bibliographic resources and the agents associated with them (IFLA Working Group on Functional Requirements and Numbering of Authority Records 2009). These models represented a significant departure from previous conceptions of library data, and as a result, RDA is structured quite differently from preceding descriptive codes. While a specific section of RDA remains

devoted to the creation of access points and authority records for persons, vastly more descriptive elements are now prescribed and are meant to help catalog users identify and contextualize data about persons (RDA 2010). RDA is derived from the Anglo-American tradition of catalog codes, but it's evident the standard was designed to have more international appeal, and it has been tested or implemented in translated versions in a number of non-English speaking countries (Poulter 2012). RDA is also the first major Anglo-American descriptive code designed specifically for electronic systems and records.

#### 2.1.4 MARC Community Information Format (1992)

Libraries have a long history of collecting and providing access to local community information, including services, groups, and expert individuals. Historically, much of this information has been kept in vertical paper files (Bunch 1982). By the mid 1980s, the trend toward automated, integrated library systems led to increased interest among libraries and library vendors in including community information in the catalog (McClintock 1992). In 1992, a new format of MARC encoding was approved to facilitate the entry of community resource records into electronic catalogs. The *MARC Community Information Format* (MARC CI) was designed to encode community-based, non-bibliographic resources, including individuals, organizations, programs, and events (2017). Descriptions are accomplished through the encoding of elements into fixed and variable fields typical of the MARC format; major areas of description include names, addresses, description, and notes. MARC CI serves as a structural and communications standard for data. Unlike other MARC formats, however, no corresponding content standard (such as *AACR2*) exists to guide the choice and formatting of element values. Rather, MARC CI was developed based on contemporary practice, under the belief that practice had already matured without formal content standards for this area (Bruns 1992). Indeed, MARC CI may be the only widespread library standard for community information. Though MARC CI saw significant adoption at the time, many libraries and library vendors have since moved away from it, preferring websites (McCallum 2009) or proprietary formats. Even so, MARC CI remains an actively updated format, though its current level of implementation among libraries is unclear.

#### 2.1.5 Oral History Cataloging Manual (1995)

Oral history is the practice of recording and preserving the first-hand experiences of individuals. Oral histories typically take the form of an audio or video recorded in-

terview between a researcher and an individual narrator. Thus, the resulting materials can be seen as information resources representing the narrators and their stories. Along with other cultural heritage institutions, libraries have been heavily involved with the sponsorship, production, preservation, and curation of oral history projects (Hansen 2009). As information resources, oral history materials have been described in various ways in libraries. In 1995, formal library cataloging rules for oral histories were published, providing standardized guidance on how to represent and provide access to these materials. The *Oral History Cataloging Manual (OHCM)* was created in order to facilitate the inclusion of oral history materials into the general catalog rather than separate discovery tools (Matters 1995). As such, the *OHCM* draws heavily from other library standards, including *AACR2*, MARC, and *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts (APPM)* (Hensen 1989). Though the unit of descriptive analysis is a specific interview or set of interviews grouped under a project or collection, *OHCM* allows the recording of significant amounts of information concerning the person or persons serving as interview subjects. Influenced by practices of archival cataloging, the biographical information element encourages catalogers to record a variety of contextualizing information concerning the narrator, including occupation, ethnicity, religion, names of family members, and political affiliations. *OHCM* was highly influential in guiding oral history practices in libraries, though today a variety of other metadata standards and guidelines exist for libraries and other institutions producing oral histories.

#### 2.1.6 Living Library Organiser's Guide (2005)

"Human libraries" are social events in which volunteers act as human "books," available to be checked out in order to tell their personal stories to readers. Typically, human books have a social motive and are intended to serve as living representations of discrimination or other issues within a community. Thus, through the resulting discussion between "book" and "reader," it is hoped that prejudices may be confronted and all participants will learn more about their community. Though organized around the metaphor of a library, these events may occur in a variety of settings, including festivals, schools, and community centers, however, public, school, and academic libraries are frequent venues (Constable and Harris 2008). "Human libraries" began occurring in Europe in the early 2000s, and since then have been held regularly in over seventy countries around the world ("The Human Library Organization" 2016). The first official guidelines for hosting these events, the *Living Library Organiser's Guide (LLOG)*, was published in 2005 by the Council of

Europe (Abergel et al. 2005). A variety of work must take place in preparing for and hosting a “human library” event; critical among these is the arrangement and presentation of a catalog of human “books.” The *LLOG* recommends a loose-leaf binder be prepared, with each sheet representing one human book, containing a descriptive title, summary description, and list of associated stereotypes (Little et al. 2011). Personal names are intentionally withheld. Guidelines encourage event organizers to involve human books in the creation of their own catalog representations. “Human library” catalogs are typically associated with one event and are not publicly shared or maintained afterwards.

## 2.2 Analysis

Ostensibly, all six standards are devoted, either in full or in part, to the description of persons. As such, on the surface, there are a number of similarities and overlaps among the standards. True, persons are represented and distinguished from each other through common elements such as names, dates, and titles; however, closer inspection reveals the emergence of a number of critical differences concerning seemingly similar elements, as well as the scope and goals of the various standards and their respective definitions of a “person.”

To explore these similarities and differences, we performed a qualitative content analysis of the six selected standards, beginning by first identifying relevant portions of each document. As standards such as *RDA* contain extensive rules for describing a number of types of resources, it was necessary to limit our analysis to just the portions of each standard that were about describing persons. Thus, our analysis focused on chapter two of *AACR*, chapters twenty two and twenty six of *AACR2*, and chapter nine of *RDA*, along with related introductory matter from each of these standards. The entirety of *MARC CI*, *OCHM*, and *LLOG* were analyzed.

Within each of the identified sections, we then coded for elements, or categories of information prescribed by each of the standards. Though certain expected elements such as name and dates were common, we were somewhat surprised at the variety of other elements that occurred across the standards, including, for instance, profession and gender. Once elements from each of the standards were identified, we performed a semantic alignment to group corresponding elements together where possible under generic labels. As a result, we were able to identify seventeen general elements used across the standards, as depicted in Table 1.

Within each of the standards, we performed a close reading of rules and examples associated with each of the identified elements, paying attention to patterns and

their implications. For example, in determining a person’s name, *AACR2* 22.2B2 prescribes separate treatment for each of a person’s pseudonyms, stating, “If a person has established two or more bibliographic identities... choose, as the basis for the heading for each group of works, the name by which works in that group are identified” (2005). Though this rule covers the name element, its wording holds deeper significance for who or what can be considered as a “person.” Rules for some elements are very strictly defined, while in some other cases, the cataloger is given significant discretion. For example, in *OCHM* 2.7B1, under biographical information, a long list of potential information to include is presented, with the rules explaining, “The repository or individual cataloger must decide which available information to use and whether to seek additional information that is not readily available” (Matters 1995, 39). Finally, findings for each of the seventeen general elements were reviewed across all six standards, with any similarities, differences, shifts, and disruptions examined and noted. From this comparison, a number of major themes were identified, as elaborated below.

## 3.0 Discussion

Our analysis covered six different library standards, representing four distinct descriptive traditions, and covering a span of fifty years. Given such a scope, we amassed a number of findings but have limited our attention to those that seemed most pervasive, cut across all standards, and had the largest overall implications. Major findings have been compiled into four thematic groups. The first theme covers the complex but fundamental issue of determining what a “person” is. The second theme follows a shift from persons as names to persons as identities. Our third theme examines specific perspectives and biases that have emerged or waned over time. Finally, our last theme examines the changing sources of justification for information about persons. Together, these themes form a set of interconnected narratives that help shed light on the overall history of library depictions of persons.

### 3.1 What is a person?

Over the past fifty years, library standards have differed greatly in their treatment of data about personal entities, starting with the very definition of what a person is. In the sections of *AACR* (1967) dedicated to the formation and use of personal name headings, the standard does not explicitly address who or what may be considered a person, perhaps leaving the interpretation of such a basic concept to the common sense of the user. At most, an

	AACR	AACR2	MARC CI	OHCM	LLOG	RDA
Name	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Name Title	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>
Dates	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>
Distinguishing Term	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>
Fuller Form of Name		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>
Relationship/Affiliation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>
Address			<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>
Hours			<input type="checkbox"/>			
Programs Offered			<input type="checkbox"/>			
Description/Summary			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Target Group			<input type="checkbox"/>			
Biographical/Historical Note			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Language			<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Credentials			<input type="checkbox"/>			
Profession/Field			<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender						<input type="checkbox"/>
Place of Birth/Death						<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Associated Place						<input type="checkbox"/>
Numeric Identifier						<input type="checkbox"/>
Classification			<input type="checkbox"/>			
Stereotype Represented					<input type="checkbox"/>	
Role				<input type="checkbox"/>		
Descriptive Title					<input type="checkbox"/>	

Table 1. Descriptive elements for persons within each standard.

ostensive definition is offered through the use of examples such as authors, editors, translators, and other individuals of bibliographic interest. *AACR2* (2005) similarly offers no specific definition of a person, though the definition for a personal author is given as “the person chiefly responsible for the creation of the intellectual or artistic content of a work.” Unlike its predecessor, however, *AACR2* begins to recognize and confront some of the complexity associated with persons and their relationships to bibliographic works. For instance, pseudonyms could now be established as separate bibliographic identities (e.g., separate authority records for Charles L. Dodgson and his pseudonym Lewis Carroll). Works created through communication with the spiritual world recog-

nized not only the medium as personal entity but the spirit as one as well. Furthermore, an authority record established for the spirit would be separate from the authority record for the once-living person. While such practices would seem to have serious philosophical implications, it is likely that these rules were designed more as pragmatic solutions to facilitate expediency in cataloging than as a statement on the nature of personhood. Still, with *AACR2*, we see library standards begin to grapple with more ontological questions concerning persons.

MARC CI was developed during the middle of *AACR2*'s reign as predominant descriptive standard in English-speaking libraries. As such, *AACR2*'s influence can be seen in how MARC CI conceptualizes persons, in-

cluding its juxtaposition of pragmatism and philosophy. In MARC CI (2017), persons are defined as individuals, relevant to the community in some manner, with a particular expertise such as teaching or translating. Describing persons with MARC CI would seem to imply they are individuals who may be contacted for assistance. However, the standard goes on to state that “individuals” also includes biblical characters, clans, families, and some works of art. Persons can then be taken to include groups of people and symbolic people as well. Though it is unclear under what circumstances such entities may serve as community resources, it is clear that MARC CI has inherited *AACR2*'s more philosophical stance on identities or personae as persons. In contrast, though *OHCM* was also directly influenced by *AACR2*, it remains focused on a specific set of resources and defines persons narrowly and pragmatically in relation to them. In the context of an oral history, a person is anyone able to communicate their recollections of their own experiences, as well as anyone serving to facilitate these communications or compile them (Matters 1995). In effect, persons are limited to interviewees, interviewers, and collectors, and any deeper ontological issues are avoided.

RDA (2010) offers the most clear and complete definition of a person, and in doing so, is able to encompass conceptions of persons from all of the preceding standards. Here, a person is defined as “an individual or an identity established by an individual, either alone or in collaboration with one or more other individuals” and includes “persons named in sacred scriptures or apocryphal books, fictitious and legendary persons, and real non-human entities.” This definition continues the trend to interpret persons more philosophically as identities or personae, and is now capable of encompassing entities such as animals and artificial intelligences as well. Though RDA offers a broad and inclusive conception of persons, some library practices may continue to require more stringent definitions. In “human libraries,” there are two important classes of persons: books and readers. Both are types of human beings who can enter into personal dialogues with others. *LLOG* goes on to further stipulate that human books are “people representing groups fre-

quently confronted with prejudices and stereotypes, and who are often victims of discrimination or social exclusion” (Abergel et al. 2005, 9). Just as with oral histories, “human libraries” utilize a more limited definition of persons in relation to a specific interaction; spirits and pseudonyms hold little relevance here.

### 3.2 Name to identity

As Petrucciani (2004) puts it, library treatment of data associated with persons has conceptually lagged behind its treatment of bibliographic works. Though bibliographic records have represented complete, if somewhat unclear entities, the earliest library records for persons were largely limited to names. Indeed, earlier in the tradition of authority work, the focus is clearly on the name; workflows revolved around establishing names as unique strings of characters to represent persons of bibliographic importance. Both *AACR* and *AACR2* draw heavily on the Paris Principles in conceptualizing data about persons. Under the Paris Principles, descriptive work entails the choice of a preferred form of name for a person, and the formatting of this name into a heading designed to aid in structuring the catalog (Buizza 2004). The resulting heading and any supporting information are recorded in an authority record (Figure 2).

As such, under both *AACR* (1967) and *AACR2* (2005), work is focused on the construction of headings through the combination of a preferred name and other qualifying terms in order to achieve differentiation from all other headings in the catalog. Descriptive elements between the two standards are expectedly similar, relying on names, dates, and titles, with most elements only required if needed for differentiation. Once differentiation among names is achieved, no further information is to be recorded, resulting in the most concise authority record possible. However, the allowance for authority records for each of a person's different bibliographic identities in *AACR2* portended a growing acknowledgment of the identities associated with these names.

Subsequent to the initial 1978 publication of *AACR2*, a variety of technological and conceptual changes would

**Personal Name Heading:** Vargason, G. Dale (Gary Dale)  
**Variant(s):** Vargason, Dale  
 Vargason, Gary Dale  
**Found In:** Vargason, G.D. A discography of the 78 rpm collection of jazz records at the Music Library, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1999: t.p. (G. Dale Vargason)  
 Vargason, G.D. A bibliography of the works of Ernst Bacon, 1999: t.p. (Gary Dale Vargason Jr.)

Figure 2. *AACR2* record for G. Dale Vargason.

begin shifting the focus from names to more complete descriptions of persons. The trend toward library system automation in the 1980s can be seen as an important influence (Buizza 2004). The very nature of database architecture encouraged the conception of personal authority records as entities with relationships to other database objects. Hand in hand with the adoption of electronic library systems was the proliferation of the MARC format. In adapting MARC to encode and represent the traditionally paper community information files, libraries began creating records for persons, separate from authority records. MARC CI records were heavily inspired by the MARC bibliographic format, and feature significant amounts of descriptive information in addition to names, including language and affiliation (Figure 3).

In an effort to incorporate these resources into the mainstream electronic catalog, the automation movement also prompted the creation of formal guidelines for cataloging oral history materials (Matters 1995). Even though the unit of analysis remains the interview or collection, guidelines encourage the recording of rich biographical notes in order to contextualize interview subjects. During the same period, new standards worked to further develop how libraries conceptualized persons as data. Though the *Guidelines for Authority Records and References (GARR)* maintained authority work's focus on establishing name-based headings, it also predicted that varying representations of a single person could exist alongside each other, linked by a standard identifier (IFLA Working Group on GARE Revision 2001). This is emblematic of the changing mindset that libraries were responsible for keeping track of more than just names but the entities behind them.

Though RDA may be seen as a descendant of *AACR* and *AACR2*, it represents a significant shift from its predecessors in terms of how persons and other agents are handled. Crucial to RDA's (2010) description of persons is the concept of an entity: records represent agent entities, and data recorded are meant to help users find and under-

stand agents. Under RDA, persons, names, and headings (now termed access points) are clearly distinguished from each other. Largely responsible for this conceptual shift was the incorporation of *FRAD*, a model for authority data that looks to explicitly entity-based models such as *FRBR* and indecs "content model" for inspiration (Patton 2004). The resulting document lays out persons, along with other agent types, as entities replete with descriptive attributes and relationships to other entities (IFLA Working Group on Functional Requirements and Numbering of Authority Records 2009). In realizing *FRAD*, RDA also encourages the recording of elements beyond what might appear in an access point, such as gender or place of birth (Figure 4). Though name elements are among the most important descriptive pieces, it is clear in RDA that authority records are meant to represent more complete identities rather than simply names or headings. Though "human libraries" remain quite separate from the other library traditions, "human library" descriptions are also very much focused on individual identities. Names aren't just of lesser importance here, they are expressly forbidden from even being recorded (Abergel et al. 2005).

### 3.3 Diversity and inclusivity

As with many knowledge organizing practices, authority work has faced the long-standing challenge of achieving widespread utility while recognizing and respecting local cultures and languages (Buizza 2004). Due to their intended scope, it is not surprising that the Anglo-American cataloging rules (*AACR* and *AACR2*) often prioritized the English language; however, accompanying this can be seen a general bias toward western, Christian culture, particularly concerning the representation of persons. In *AACR* (1967), many terms used to qualify a name are to be recorded in English, regardless of actual usage. Saints' names are to be qualified with the word "Saint," and royal and ecclesiastical titles for all names are similarly to be recorded

**Name:** Vargason, G. Dale (Gary Dale).  
**Address:** P.O. Box 553, Wayland, NY 14572, 585-555-6101  
**Description:** Specializes in the purchase and sales of papers, books, and ephemera. Available to perform appraisals for papers and general antiques.  
**Biographical Note:** Education: B.A., Binghamton University. M.A., M.L.S., SUNY Buffalo.  
**Language:** Speaks English.  
**Affiliations:** Owner of G. Dale Vargason Rare Books and Ephemera.  
**Subject(s):** Printed ephemera.  
 Antiquarian booksellers.  
 Appraisers.  
 Antiques.

Figure 3. MARC CI record for G. Dale Vargason.

**Name:** Vargason, G. Dale, 1970-  
**Associated Place(s):** Nichols (Tioga County, N.Y.), United States, Wayland (N.Y.)  
**Address:** P.O. Box 553, Wayland, NY 14572  
**Field of Activity:** Printed ephemera, Antiques, Musicology, Library science  
**Associated Group(s):** G. Dale Vargason Rare Books and Ephemera  
 State University of New York at Binghamton, State University of New York at Buffalo, Sibley Music Library  
**Occupation:** Appraisers, Antiquarian booksellers, Music librarians  
**Gender:** Males  
**Language:** eng  
**Fuller Form of Name:** Gary Dale  
**Variant(s):** Vargason, Dale, 1970-  
 Vargason, Gary Dale, 1970-  
**Found In:** Vargason, G.D. A discography of the 78 rpm collection of jazz records at the Music Library, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1999: t.p. (G. Dale Vargason)  
 Vargason, G.D. A bibliography of the works of Ernst Bacon, 1999: t.p. (Gary Dale Vargason Jr.)  
 Phone call to G. D. Vargason, June 12, 2017 (G. (Gary) Dale Vargason, b. July 23, 1970 in Nichols, N.Y. and currently located in Wayland, N.Y.; studied musicology and library science at SUNY Binghamton and University at Buffalo; owner of G. Dale Vargason Rare Books and Ephemera, specializing in sales and appraisal of papers, books, antiques, and ephemera; previously music librarian at Sibley Music Library, Rochester, N.Y.)

Figure 4. RDA record for G. Dale Vargason.

with English terminology). Dates associated with a person must be recorded using Christian eras and the Gregorian calendar. *AACR2* (2005) continues this approach, with several minor alterations. For example, titles of nobility may now be recorded in the vernacular if warranted. Most religious titles must still be recorded in English, however, and even the name of the rule, “22.16C Bishops, Etc.” implies a Christian bias. During a time period in which international cooperative cataloging was on the rise, representations of persons generated with *AACR/AACR2* carried a clearly English, western perspective with them.

In contrast, standards for oral histories and community information have little to say regarding languages or calendars, though for different reasons. As *OHCM* was developed specifically for oral history collections in the United States, an English language catalog is assumed, and all examples are given in English. For forms of names including titles, dates, and other qualifiers, *OHCM* defers to other standards: *APPM* and *AACR2* (Matters 1995). Thus personal names are optimized for the same community of users as *AACR2*, and carry the same potential biases as well. On the other hand, like other variations of MARC21, MARC CI was established as an international standard, intended for use worldwide. As a structural standard rather than a content standard, MARC CI has little to say regarding the choice and formatting of specific element values. Though English-speaking libraries may have chosen to follow *AACR2* conventions, they are not explicitly prescribed. Furthermore, the text of the MARC CI standard is available in multiple languages, in-

cluding French, Spanish, and Serbian. As the resulting catalogs of community experts and other resources are intended to be hyper-localized, guidelines are left general, with the assumption that requisite language and cultural optimization will be handled by catalogers. With MARC CI, we see a move toward a more frequent prescription of institutional preference in description of persons.

With the advent of RDA, this trend toward institutional preference would come to library authority work as well. In keeping in line with its international aspirations, the text of RDA (2010) is careful to employ language more inclusive of diverse cultures. In describing persons, gone are specific language, terminology, or calendar prescriptions. Dates may be recorded according to any calendar preferred by the creating agency, and most royal, noble, or religious titles are given either in the conferred language or the language preferred by the institution. The text of RDA has even been translated into a number of different languages, including Chinese, Finnish, and German, further facilitating use in a variety of international settings. Oddly enough, in the English edition, some Anglo-centric terminology restrictions from *AACR2* remain. Saints and spirits must be qualified by the English term only, and a section on religious titles has retained the “Bishops, Etc.” label from *AACR2*. In contrast to the universal ambitions of RDA, guidelines for the “human library” are meant to effect local-specific representations of persons, similar to guidelines for community information. *LLOG* stipulates no specific language or terminology but encourages organizers to use those of the community, particularly when formulating

stereotypes (Abergel et al. 2005). Thus, “human libraries” may be seen as institutional preference in description in the extreme. Unlike authority records, “human library” records are not intended to be shared among institutions, and while they are optimized for relevance to one community, they may be quite exclusive of others.

### 3.4 Justification, authority, and self-identification

A person may be known by more than one name, and variations or discrepancies among names and other pieces of information are quite common. In describing persons, different library traditions have appealed to different sources of authority or justification for resolving such situations. Authority work has traditionally relied on literary warrant, specifically common usage within certain sources. However, which sources and what constitutes common usage has varied over time. In *AACR* (1967), the emphasis throughout is on usage in reference sources; the language, form, and spelling of a person’s name are to be determined by trusted reference works. Under this approach, scholarly communities are thus relied upon to name and identify the person of interest. People being cataloged have little say in what they are called, save for some minor aspects. For example, if a name must be Romanized, the form preferred by the person is to be used. Though still following the principle of common usage, *AACR2* (2005) switched emphasis to usage in a person’s own works. Form of name is to be determined from chief sources of information in works by that person, in their own language, thus bringing justification closer to a person’s intent. An even more significant acknowledgment for self-identification may be seen in *AACR2*’s treatment of pseudonyms. Whereas an alternative option in *AACR* allowed the recognition of multiple bibliographic identities, *AACR2* explicitly treats pseudonyms as separate but related persons. This approach adheres more closely to personal intent and self-identification.

Though library authority work tends to deal more with materials that have been formally published, oral history work is typically focused on the collection and creation of unique materials. While oral histories may be conducted with a formally published author, for many subjects, there may be no chief sources of information or trusted reference works available to consult. As such, with respect to sources of information, *OHC*M allows a wide range of permissible sources, including the interview itself as well as “correspondence, donor agreements or releases, grant requests, [and] interviewer worksheets” (Matters 1995, 20), demonstrating a broad acceptance of the contextual nature of oral histories. Oral histories are not replicable, and thus in respect to the people involved, do not draw on their authority from universal sources but the idiosyncratic sources

typical of archival work. Though oral history catalogers may still rely on authority work practices to determine a form of name, the availability of first-hand resources may lead to greater consideration of personal preferences, particularly for biographical history notes. Participation in an oral history is, after all, an act of self-identification. MARC CI also shows a greater potential for considering persons themselves as the primary source of justification. As a structural standard rather than a content standard, MARC CI has little to say on formal sources of justification in determining names and other elements of personal information. With no specific sources prescribed, it is assumed that the creating agency will determine appropriate ones. As individuals must presumably give their consent to be cataloged as community information resources, such representations are most likely developed in consultation with the person being described.

Of all the library traditions explored here, “human libraries” rely most extensively on the person as the primary source of authority and justification. Guidelines for the “human library” encourage event organizers to cooperatively develop descriptions with the human books. Though names are not included, human books are consulted for their descriptions and titles. *LLOG* gives some very blatant example titles, such as “homosexual” or “elderly person,” though the assumption here is that the human books have chosen these labels themselves (Abergel et al. 2005). However, while human books have autonomy in participating and self-describing, they are not fully in control of how they are viewed. Human book descriptions must also include stereotypes and prejudices, which are initially brainstormed by event organizers and later checked with the human books themselves. Thus, while human books serve as the primary source of authority on themselves, the community represents a second source of authority. Both sources are necessary in representing the human books in a manner conducive to the core goals of the “human library” event.

Though the most recent of these standards, RDA largely continues the traditional perspective of authority work. Common usage in sources associated with a person represents the primary means and justification for form of name. Beyond this, however, RDA is more inclusive of additional sources, and for the first time in descriptive catalog codes, mentions the use of online sources for additional information. RDA prescribes many descriptive elements beyond name; however, a number of which may not find justification through literary warrant. For elements such as place of birth or gender, then, RDA allows information to be taken from any source. As such, catalogers are not precluded from seeking out the personal preferences of the individual being described. Though a person’s self-identification may be taken into greater ac-

count under RDA, their intent for such information to be disclosed is another matter.

#### 4.0 Summary

We return to our original questions. First, how have libraries construed the notion of a “person” over time? Our analysis shows there is range of responses to this question from thinking of a string of symbols formed as a name to serve as a representation of a person, as in a traditional authority record, to a person being a representation or surrogate for a social problem, as in “human library” projects. For a single person, multiple, separate records can exist under each of these systems of representation for different purposes. In library descriptions, then, the true unit of analysis is the identity rather than the person.

Where and when have shifts in practice and perspective taken place? Our analysis suggests that the biggest shift occurs in the overall goals of representing people. Is it to find an efficient way of telling them apart (and no more) or is it to fully describe them so the information about them is contextualized? Closely related are technological shifts and changing perceptions of the responsibility of the library.

What have been viewed as the sources of authority in determining information about people? We see the movement from reliance on trusted reference sources to increasing dependence on common usage, an increasing number of valid sources, as well as self-identification. The standards we examined have expanded to allow a variety of languages, descriptions of time, and usage. Following on that, we note there is an increasing amount of personal information and increasing depth to the kinds of information available. The question that arises, though, is what is the library’s responsibility to use and record it all?

An underlying tension emerged from our analysis. In all library practices, there exists a conflict between serving the community and creating records and data with widespread usability. Depictions of persons created by libraries are meant for public use; however, there is not one, singular public. Representations of persons are frequently optimized for a specific community of users and may not serve the needs of other groups.

#### 5.0 Conclusion

Why is it useful to investigate this history? As libraries look toward merging their data with that of other resources on the web, information about people represents a particularly attractive linked data source. Library data about persons has already been incorporated into large-scale data projects such as VIAF and DBpedia (Lehmann et al. 2015). As

such, library depictions of people hold increasing relevance and implications for a widening community of users on the web. However, models of representation on the semantic web come with their own assumptions. Ontologies such as FOAF (friend of a friend) allow for the compilation of personal data from various sources but come with their own descriptive vocabularies and conceptions of persons. In addition, when library data is atomized and used outside of the confines of the catalog and other library tools, the context surrounding this data and its origins becomes further obscured. A firmer understanding of library attitudes and practices surrounding human information representations, and how they relate to similar practices from other domains, can allow for better understanding and usage of this data in all settings.

On the face of it, the ability of libraries and other institutions to amass a rich variety of information about persons seems like a positive advancement in representation and access. With data leveraged from many sources we could, in theory, represent persons with precision and a wealth of detail previously not available. It isn’t a straightforward issue, however, since what we discovered reveals a number of points to think about more deeply.

First are the ethical aspects of collecting and revealing details that are more easily compiled as systems interact with each other. Now, authority records may contain a history of a person’s gender transition or a criminal history. What is a library’s responsibility with respect to adopting standards that require such information? Furthermore, what happens with this data once it is separated from the context provided by the standard under which it was created or when the authority data is harvested for a different use? For example, Wikipedia may show an author and all the pseudonyms on one page, while RDA-guided records provide a separate record for each persona. There’s a danger of important information being lost or misinterpreted, but on the other hand, forced alignment may bring different errors. In trying to equate things that aren’t precisely the same, important conceptual disagreements are glossed over.

Libraries are not cataloging people; they are cataloging identities. An oral history interviewee, their pseudonym, their performance as a human book, and their purported spirit all receive separate treatments. Each identity garners a separate record, and each record relies on a distinct mix of descriptive elements. From a technical perspective one might ask, “Why can’t the library have just one record? Wouldn’t that be more efficient—all the information in one place?” Such a reductivist view would not work, in our opinion, since the various records do not necessarily represent the same thing, nor do they serve the same goals. We do not discourage libraries and other information institutions from leveraging data from various systems and stan-

dards. However, in doing so, they must be mindful of the original context, goals, and target communities, as well as fundamental conceptual differences and their implications.

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