

# The Case for Taxonomic Reparations

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Adler, Melissa. 2016. "The Case for Taxonomic Reparations." *Knowledge Organization* 43(8): 630-640. 53 references.

**Abstract:** Critical histories of subjects and classifications have unearthed the spatial-temporal situatedness of knowledge organization structures and terminologies. Coming to terms with the cultural foundations upon which our knowledge organizations are built and the ways they change and stay the same means that we also confront difficult truths about epistemic and systemic violence. This paper brings KO scholars into dialogue with critical race theorists, indigenous studies scholars, and queer theorists around conversations about reparations and reparative reading practices. It argues that historical studies that expose processes of exclusion and marginalization reveal the need and possibilities for creating reparative taxonomies. The paper identifies specific cases, including #BlackLivesMatter, indigenous subject headings and classifications, and the Digital Transgender Archive as models for taxonomic reparations.

Received 31 August 2016; Revised 15 October 2016; Accepted 16 October 2016

Keywords: knowledge, African, reparations, indigenous, Americans, people, classifications, organization

## 1.0 Introduction

The papers in this special issue add to the growing body of literature inquiring into the historical processes by which subjects and divisions that organize and facilitate access to knowledge take form. In recent decades, scholars and practitioners have tried to make sense of offensive, outdated, one-sided terms, and their relationships by examining subjects and systems through an ontogenetic or historical lens. Frequently, such studies analyze subjects using queer and critical race theories or from indigenous perspectives. They reveal library classifications to be reflective of the times and spaces in which they are created, revised, and amended as well as the perspectives and interests of the writers of the classifications, whether they are agencies of the State, like the Library of Congress, or social reformers who held particular views about "progress," such as Melvil Dewey. Collectively, these studies (Mai 2010; Adler and Tennis 2013; Smiraglia and Lee 2012; Feinberg 2007) demonstrate that we must now take for granted that classifications are inherently biased. They implicitly and explicitly call for new techniques and

designs for organizing knowledge. By looking at the spaces in the classifications that do harm, we locate the need and possibilities for repair and redress.

The framing of this special issue around Joseph T. Tennis's (2012) ontogenetic methodology for studying the temporal and spatial dimensions of subjects seems to signal a heightening awareness of the importance of doing knowledge organization (KO) history. The existing historical analyses of subjects tend to reveal the kinds of changes that Tennis observes: branching into more than one class, stepping from one class to another, convergence, and disappearance. Some (Adler, Huber and Nix, forthcoming) have also identified ways in which classifications have remained unchanged since the time of their inception, and have argued that these static structures and associations provide evidence about the processes by which violence has become systemic in classifications. Whereas Tennis reveals a number of changes in the organization of eugenics in the *Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC)*, we can also observe striking examples that illustrate how certain unchanging structures continue to support eugenicist discourses. For example, the Library of

Congress *Classification* (LCC) locates works on people with disabilities in the class formerly defined as “defectives.” While the name has changed, the class continues to reside in the same hierarchies, meaning that certain associations and structures that were designed in the early twentieth century continue to hold well into the twenty-first. Arguably, the original structure was derived from and reinforced state and cultural discourses that identified disabilities as defects in order to support eugenicist agendas. The placement of the class currently labeled “people with disabilities” within the broader category of “social pathology. social and public welfare. criminology” in the social sciences, and the location of that class near sections designated for criminals and groups identified as “dependents” of the state (such as people who are homeless, older people, drug addicts, and so on), supply documentary evidence of the political and social agendas that informed the classification’s design. The fact that some of these structures remain unchanged also reveals important information about the embeddedness of those discourses. Indeed, classification systems have a direct bearing on how we organize, seek, and find information about people—often some of the most marginalized and vulnerable. Doing histories of subjects across disciplines helps us to understand classifications in the context of wider policies and agendas, as well as ways in which racism, heteronormativity, imperialism, and patriarchy have become systemic over time in KO systems.

My aim in this paper is to engage critical historical KO with broader conversations about reparations. Proposals for financial reparations for centuries of injustices toward African Americans have been debated for decades, and we have been witnessing an increase in efforts to reconcile and redress centuries of harm to indigenous communities. A reparative turn is also happening in queer studies, as histories of trauma and critiques of heteronormativity reveal openings for repair and creativity. Understanding and coming to terms with painful histories is at the heart of all of these reparative projects, and most calls for reparations include detailed historical accounts of violence and disenfranchisement to support claims that the injustices that took place in the past have real effects on lives and society in the present. “Repair” does not refer to a correction of legacies of wrong-doings, but rather, it is a matter of truth-telling, accountability, negotiation, redistribution, and redress. It is vital that KO scholars continue to do critical historical work to understand the ways in which violence has become systemic, what that means for access to information, how classifications affect self-knowledge and identity formation for seekers of information, and the consequences for making and doing histories of peoples, communities, nations, and territories. In spaces where unjust practices have become deeply embedded and hard to

undo, I suggest we consider making reparative taxonomies that consciously respond to injustice. I argue that the marginalization of “others” in our classifications has contributed to long-term disenfranchisement and cultural imperialism, and we need to take seriously the call to hold the information professions accountable, negotiate new ways of organizing information, and think about how taxonomies might work toward redress by redistributing access to knowledge.

Reparative taxonomies might be considered a subset of what Duff and Harris (2002) describe as “liberatory descriptive standards,” in contrast to the dominant systems for description that obscure and marginalize certain voices. Duff and Harris present criteria for liberatory description, arguing that transparency is essential at all levels, including making the processes and biases explicit, holding the creators accountable, affirming the open-ended making and remaking of archival records and interpretation, and inviting users to participate in the co-creation of records and meaning. For liberatory description to succeed it must take the users’ needs into account and recognize that people come to the archive with different purposes and methods, which require different ways of organization and naming. A liberatory standard for description would (Duff and Harris 2002, 285) “require engagement with the marginalized and the silenced. Space would be given to the sub-narratives and the counter-narratives.” Michelle Caswell (2011) has identified the Documentation Center of Cambodia’s (DC-Cam) use of ethnic classifications in their database as a liberatory descriptive technique. The insertion of ethnic categories derived from the resources into the database entries has supported the Cambodian human rights tribunal’s case in charging the Khmer Rouge regime with genocide. Caswell argues that the “strategic use of categories” by archivists effectively holds perpetrators of human rights violations accountable (163). DC-Cam’s database is exemplary of the methods explained by Duff and Harris (2002), as the director of DC-Cam is a Khmer Rouge victim and the organization intentionally deploys categories with purpose and transparency, making the system trustworthy to its users, including victims, scholars, and legal professionals.

Taxonomic reparation, however, suggests that an organization or individual is making amends and holding oneself accountable for doing harm. One might consider certain efforts on the part of the Library of Congress (LC) acts of reparation. For example, the development of the Subject Authority Cooperative Organization (SACO) of the Program for Cooperative Cataloging, which invites catalogers to propose new and changed headings and classes, might be considered a reparative gesture, as it aims to democratize the name and subject authorization process. Although this is certainly better policy, it falls

short of taxonomic reparation. LC's democratic processes are majoritarian and authoritarian, with final decisions being made by a committee. By definition, uniform subject terms and classes simply cannot represent a multitude of voices or perspectives. Additionally, LC has not publicly acknowledged harm or attempted to make amends. As a library that aims to serve a large, global, general public, there is a limit to the changes LC can make at local and particular levels. Activist cataloging and metadata creation, including building taxonomies with communities are necessary for describing and organizing site and subject-specific collections. Later in this paper, I will provide examples of KO projects that might be useful models for reparative taxonomies.

First I provide an overview of some of the foundational KO literature that does the kind of historical, critical work to which I am referring. I bring KO scholars into dialogue with conversations about reparation in and among racialized, indigenous, and queer communities and identify specific cases, including #BlackLivesMatter, indigenous subject headings and classifications, and the Digital Transgender Archive as reparative projects.

## 2.0 Critical KO and reparation

When Sanford Berman (1971) listed the hundreds of biased and unjust headings in the *Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)*, he unleashed a movement involving the circulation and submission of petitions by librarians and scholars and arguably led to democratizing subject cataloging practices, such as the creation of SACO. In the years since Berman published *Prejudices and Antipathies*, people have continued to aggressively critique subject classifications in scholarly papers, propose new headings and classes, and invent new systems for organizing knowledge. Indeed, Berman's critiques opened the field to productive conversations, action, and change. The increase and correction of subject headings with regard to groups of people have undoubtedly improved the conditions and methods by which information is sought, found, and obtained.

For thinking about taxonomic reparation, I am interested most specifically in the historical and critical research into subject classifications that address violence concomitant with access to information. Hope Olson's (1998; 2000; 2002; 2007) feminist and postcolonial critiques of knowledge organizations systems have unearthed the complexity of certain tensions and paradoxes in universal classifications, opening up a field of inquiry into the limitations and possibilities for representing a multitude of perspectives and concepts. She has identified some of the present-day problems as results of historical processes that have naturalized structures and rela-

tionships. It is now widely acknowledged by KO scholars and practitioners that our current systems were established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by white, propertied, Protestant men, who adopted Enlightenment era scientific principles to order knowledge according to disciplinary conventions. Categories have been ordered in ways that uphold dominant ideas about bodies and identities. Alternatives to accepted norms are established along universalized and invisible whiteness and heteropatriarchy, for instance.

Bowker and Star's (1999) *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*, is widely regarded as a seminal text that uses historical and theoretical methods to interrogate certain classifications that have organized political, social, and daily life. The authors unmask the relations of power and the political agendas that undergird such systems. Most relevant to this paper is their analysis of the use of classifications in Apartheid era South Africa, and the ways in which social and political agendas are built into the infrastructures that organize information about people by physical characteristics in order to regulate movement, access to services, education, and fundamental human rights.

A growing body of work is moving beyond critique and into actionable recommendations for practice, and some of these can be considered acts of repair. For example, Olson (1998) has suggested a variety of feminist techniques for mapping subjects; Furner (2007) has used Critical Race Theory to question certain "deracialization" measures; Green (2015), the current senior editor of the *DDC*, has accounted for problems regarding indigenous subjects and made recommendations for change; and Drabinski (2013) has suggested that the catalog and its organization of queer subjects present opportunities for critical information literacy pedagogy as they instruct librarians and seekers of information about the epistemic limitations of library classifications.

Below, I draw from critical interdisciplinary fields, as well as library and information science (LIS) scholarship, to understand how reparations are conceived and articulated in different contexts. I begin with the quest for reparations for African Americans, which, according to Robert L. Allen (1998), began over one hundred fifty years ago. I then discuss the ways in which indigenous communities have sought reparations and some of the specific problems resulting from a history of settler colonialism. Lastly, I describe what some scholars describe as a "reparative turn" in queer studies that has taken shape in dialogue with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's call for reparative reading practices and Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic work. For the most part, I am drawing from North American contexts for the analysis below, but it is worth pointing out that similar reparations efforts have been

negotiated around the globe for decades, including reparations for Holocaust survivors and Apartheid victims in South Africa.

### 3.0 Reparations for African Americans

In 1989, Congressman John Conyers introduced a bill to create a presidential commission to examine the need and feasibility of reparations for African Americans. That bill has been put before Congress every year since, but it has yet to be brought to the floor for consideration. Now titled, “The Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act,” the 2015 version of the bill states its purpose:

To acknowledge the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality and inhumanity of slavery in the United States and the 13 American colonies between 1619 and 1865, and to establish a commission to examine the institution of slavery, subsequently de jure and de facto racial and economic discrimination against African Americans, and the impact of these forces on living African Americans, to make recommendations to the Congress on appropriate remedies, and for other purposes.

Ta-Nehisi Coates argued in 2014 that lawmakers must have an honest conversation about reparations for the discriminatory policies that have been imposed on African Americans over time. He focuses on the long-term effects of the set of policies known as redlining, which started with federal housing policy and has been reinforced by banks, private investors, insurance companies, and real estate companies. Coates argues that the present gap in wealth between white and African Americans was engineered based on segregationist logic, peaking in the middle of the twentieth century, and it continues today. Relatedly, Michelle Alexander (2014) has published a damning account of the U.S. criminal justice system, arguing that the mass incarceration of African Americans must be understood as an extension of slavery and Jim Crow policies. People who call for reparations argue that the legacy of slavery has had lasting effects in the lives of African Americans, and compensation might begin to address and alleviate disparities in wealth and access to civil rights. Possible remedies include a formal apology from the United States government, payments to descendants of African slaves, and free education for African Americans. Most advocates for reparations for African Americans recognize this as a global issue, as the conditions in the U.S. are tied to a history of colonization in Africa and the African diaspora.

Calls for reparations for African Americans date back to 1854, when the need for redress for the harm done at

the hands of American whites was articulated at an emigrationist convention (Allen 1998). After the American Civil War, Sojourner Truth campaigned for free public land for former slaves, and she argued (quoted in Allen 1998, 2): “America owes to my people some of the dividends. She can afford to pay and she must pay. I shall make them understand that there is a debt to the Negro people which they can never repay.” Various coalitions and organizations made demands for reparations for African Americans throughout the twentieth century. Perhaps the most dramatic event was the presentation of a “Black Manifesto” by James Forman, former chair of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, at a 1969 protest. That document demanded \$500 million in reparation to African Americans from white churches and synagogues (Allen 1998, 3).

The recent exposure of police brutality against African Americans has brought racism in the U.S. into plain sight, forcing Americans to confront the realities of the legacies of slavery and Jim Crow laws, as well as current policies and practices that continue to disenfranchise and threaten African Americans. The Movement for Black Lives, a coalition of more than fifty organizations, has issued a major policy platform with a highly documented and detailed set of action items. Among them is a set of demands for reparations in areas of housing, K-12 and higher education, and economic equality. They also demand passage of the Conyers Bill (H.R. 40) to examine reparations proposals. Additionally, the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent reported on 18 August, 2016 that the U.S. government should pay reparations for slavery. It is worth quoting the UN at length (18):

Despite the positive measures, the Working Group remains extremely concerned about the human rights situation of African Americans. In particular, the legacy of colonial history, enslavement, racial subordination and segregation, racial terrorism and racial inequality in the United States remains a serious challenge, as there has been no real commitment to reparations and to truth and reconciliation for people of African descent.

The United Nations report also recommends passage of H.R. 40.

The call for reparations has also been heard in the realm of knowledge and scholarship. Aldon Morris (2015) has delivered a compelling account of the marginalization of W. E. B. Du Bois and his work in the sociological community. Morris argues that Du Bois must be considered a founder of sociology and the first scientific sociologist. According to Morris, Du Bois developed methods and theories that were widely adopted in the renowned Chi-

chicago School, and he directly influenced and corresponded with such scholars as Max Weber. Nevertheless, Du Bois's scholarship was suppressed by researchers in his day, and in the twenty-first century, knowledge about and by Du Bois and other African Americans remains at the margins of the canon. Julian Go (2016) states, "the cost of such marginalization is not simply an ethical one, it is an epistemic one." Indeed, the classifications that order knowledge in libraries were produced at the same moment that Du Bois was forging a new field and method of inquiry. The racialized structures in library classifications further marginalize and obscure literature about African Americans.

Library classifications provide metanarratives about how librarians imagined African Americans to be of interest "to" a reading public in the U.S., but not "of" the reading public—they were classified as sources of labor and objects of study to demonstrate white supremacy and discourses around public morality. Furner (2007) has challenged the notion that it is possible or advantageous to deracialize the *DDC*. He suggests some possible recommendations for KO practice, including an acknowledgement of bias, accounting for the experiences of users who identify with racially-defined categories, tailoring classifications to specific communities, and evaluative techniques to determine the utility of systems for members of specific communities. Furner's analysis reveals a need for further historical research into the processes by which racialized categories become systemic and naturalized, as well as the ways in which those categories reflect and sustain wider cultural and state discourses about race, and the necessity of working with the communities that use and/or are represented by race-based categories. Current classifications continue to carry associations derived from white supremacist conventions of the times in which the systems were designed. I have suggested elsewhere (Adler 2017) that doing histories of knowledge organization systems provide important evidence about epistemic and systemic violence. These studies demonstrate a need for redress, which might take the form of an acknowledgement and open dialogue about the long-term effects of the application of principles, hierarchies, and names that exclude and marginalize subjects. They also reveal spaces where different ways of organizing knowledge can be imagined.

The foregrounding of Black bodies and lives by way of a seemingly simple hashtag performs the kind of reparative, liberatory knowledge organization work that I am advocating. #BlackLivesMatter collects and organizes all information that uses this tweet under a single stream, while connecting users and activists with a common aim. The liberatory aspects of the hashtag derive from the fact that information about a movement and community was produced and circulated by members of that community. In-

deed, #BlackLivesMatter has its limitations, including the misappropriation of the hashtag by people who oppose the movement in order to ridicule and condemn it. I am not making any claims about the efficacy of social media for activist platforms, but rather, I use this example to illustrate the ways in which a political and social movement has taken shape around a highly specific knowledge organization practice. The hashtag draws attention to a movement and a cause, and mobilizes activism and the circulation of knowledge and information. Certainly, there are hundreds of hashtags that do this kind of work. What makes this particular hashtag a model for reparation is that it reassembles knowledge around a political statement and a demand for recognition and action for bodies and lives that are too often marginalized in virtually every aspect of U.S. politics and culture, including media and information outlets, as well as library shelves.

Another example is the Notable Kentucky African Americans Database (<http://nkaa.uky.edu>) created at the University of Kentucky, which brings thousands of stories of African Americans with Kentucky connections all together in a digital space. Project coordinator Reinette Jones chose to derive headings from the source material to provide accurate and precise subject access. We might also describe earlier KO projects as liberatory or reparative taxonomies. The first documented African American subject access tool that I am aware of is a list of headings compiled by Frances Lydia Yocom at Fisk University Library in 1940.

It must be noted that many people view the acceptance of reparations as a validation of categories at the expense of freedom. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon wrote (2007, 179), "I am not the slave of the Slavery that dehumanized my ancestors." Reading Fanon's statement in the context of African American reparations, Chris Buck (2004) explains that (123) "demanding reparations for the historical injustices stemming from the practice of slavery requires the descendants of slaves, as a collective, to affirm an identity that unites them with their enslaved ancestors. The adoption of this identity, however, has the potential to constrain the possibility of engaging in projects of self-creation that depart from the identity." Critics of reparations movements point to the inherent technical problems with determining how, to whom, and in what amounts compensation will be distributed. Such decisions are problems of classification that hinge on biological and social definitions of race and ancestry. In Adolph Reed's view (Reed 2000; Smith 2016), reparations on the basis of race serve to "maintain the dominance of the racist interpretive frame of reference," and it maintains the fiction that there is a coherent "agenda that can be determined outside of democratic, participatory processes among those whose names decisions are to be made and resources allocated."

These kinds of conflicts are not easily resolved, and it must be acknowledged that all classificatory acts are paradoxical for the way that they facilitate access through constraint and control. This is one reason why I advocate classification and dialogue at global and local levels to present multiple points of view and purposes. It is also why continued dialogue, historical research, and open acknowledgement of racism in library classifications are needed.

#### 4.0 Reparations for indigenous communities

Reparations for indigenous peoples are differently critical, because the abuses against indigenous communities materialized in the form of elimination and removal. Indeed, they are related, as colonialism and violence were supported by white supremacy, and the processes by which land was seized, people killed, and culture removed and replaced by European models, were fueled by much of the same ideas that fueled slavery and subsequent racist policies in the United States. Settler colonialism by Europeans in most parts of the world resulted in the devastating destruction of cultures, languages, land, and lives, with the installation of Western religion, education, and customs to replace local ways of life. Patrick Wolfe marks an important distinction between the abuses of slavery and settler colonialism at the level of classification. He argues that the critical differences of racialization of Native Americans and African Americans resulted from the ways these communities figured into the formation of the U.S. Slavery produced an “inclusive taxonomy” that became fully racialized in the “one-drop rule,” meaning that “any amount of African ancestry, no matter how remote, and regardless of phenotypical appearance, makes a person Black.” Such an organizing principle reinforced the power of slave-owners, as they could claim ownership and control of anyone of African descent. The increase of Black people increased white wealth. In contrast, indigenous people threatened land-owners’ wealth, as they obstructed settlers’ access to land. Therefore, a “logic of elimination” drove a different taxonomy of indigeneity, and any non-indigenous ancestry would remove people from the category of “Indian.” This organizing principle supported the forced removal of Native Americans from their land and the dissolution of native society from the landscape (388).

It would be a mistake to suggest that a complete description of reparative projects for and among indigenous communities is possible. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) states, even the term “indigenous” is problematic, as “it appears to collectivize many distinct populations whose experiences under imperialism have been vastly different” (6). According to the United Nations, there are between four thousand and five thousand indigenous cultures in seventy different countries, and reducing these linguisti-

cally, epistemologically, and culturally diverse communities into a single category of “indigenous peoples” effaces the differences among them (Burns et al. 2010, 2333). There are many other terms that similarly refer to indigenous peoples, including, “First Nations,” “aboriginals” or “native peoples.” Very often, people prefer to be referred to by their local tribal or community name. Indeed, every context and community has its specific suite of experiences, precluding any totalizing account of the purpose and efficacy of reparations. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (2014) points out that, among Native Americans, the term “reparations” is rarely used in discussions regarding land claims and treaty rights. More commonly, demands are made for restoration, restitution, or repatriations. Each of these terms suggests a return of lands, sacred objects, and rights that were illegally obtained, rather than a monetary payment. The term “reparation” is more explicitly used in reference to compensation for victims of abuse in residential schools, particularly in Canada and Australia, where governments have acknowledged and begun to address the harm. Aboriginal children were removed from their homes and sent to residential schools, which imposed European standards for education, assimilation, life, and language, often with severe physical and emotional abuse, in order “to break their link to their culture and identity” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015; also see Cunneen 2005).

Western knowledge organization systems have directly participated in colonial projects, with consequences for access to information for indigenous communities. Research and the production of knowledge is a principle way in which imperialism and colonialism is secured. The formal rules and disciplinary conventions of the Western academy, and the repeated representations of the “other” in scholarship and media are supported by a variety of apparatuses, including classification systems. Smith (1999, 25) writes:

Imperialism provided the means through which concepts of what counts as human could be applied systematically as forms of classification, for example through hierarchies of race and typologies of different societies. In conjunction with imperial power and with “science,” these classification systems came to shape relations between imperial powers and Indigenous societies.

The same can be said for legal research, bureaucratic administration, and law and policy-making. As Chris Cunneen (2005, 68) explains, record-keeping has been essential for colonization: “It is the tool of describing, itemising, and controlling the colonised.” Legal processes in colonial contexts legitimize certain forms and sources of information, and privilege documentary evidence over other types.

The reliance on colonial records reinforces power dynamics. As Burns and colleagues (2009, 2332) point out, “the terminology used by the state often reflects a classification established by the force of law within a county and imposes external concepts of identity that may or may not be accepted by indigenous individuals or collectives.” Marisa Elena Duarte and Miranda Belarde-Lewis (2015) articulate four overlapping mechanisms by which colonialism operates, each of which centers around classification: first is the categorization of indigenous peoples into a single unit, subordinate to the colonizer, which legitimizes subjugation; second is the theft and settlement of land and social spaces; third is institutionalization and administration; and fourth is the discipline and marginalization of knowledge. Duarte and Belarde-Lewis (2015, 682) suggest that the adoption of “terms that reflect the experiences and perspectives of the marginalized is a step toward the redress of colonial power.” As the critical studies cited earlier in this paper demonstrate, the systems that organize knowledge in the twenty-first century continue to carry a variety of assumptions, many of which have been passed down from the systems that organized knowledge for colonialist agendas. Speaking about the Australian context, Cunneen (2005, 75) indicates that racial discrimination is the common factor that links colonial laws, policies, and practices, and it provides a fundamental moral and legal basis on which to build a case for reparations in the post-World War II era. I would like to suggest that taxonomic redress would reorganize and refigure what counts as knowledge, and how indigenous knowledges inform historical narratives and present discussions of rights and restitution.

A number of indigenous KO projects have been well-documented, and understanding them in terms of reparation might help to foreground their underlying activism and purpose. Reading them as decolonizing projects, they can serve as models for revisions of knowledge organization systems in a variety of contexts. For example, Ann Doyle has developed a framework for indigenous knowledge organization, which she calls *Indigenous knowledge organization@Cultural Interface*. Doyle’s theoretical framework is based on interviews with indigenous communities and her fifteen years of practice as a librarian at Xwi7xwa Library in British Columbia, Canada. She arrived at seven principles of design: indigenous authority, indigenous diversity, wholism and interrelatedness, indigenous continuity, aboriginal user warrant, designer responsibility, and institutional responsibility. She in fact frames her argument in terms of “repair” to assert that such a practice may have direct implications for policy:

The recognition of Indigenous self-representation in the public educational infrastructure could contribute to the repair of the historical and contem-

porary record of Canada and serve to educate all learners and all Canadians about aboriginal presence, agency, and participation. Rebalancing of the record could contribute to the Truth and Reconciliation efforts between Canada and aboriginal people through representation of aboriginal accounts—historic and contemporary—within the memory and collecting institutions of the country. Intellectual access to these materials, I suggest, then has the potential to activate the documents and generate interactions with researchers, scholars, indigenous communities, and others.

Relatedly, Cheryl Metoyer has worked with the Mashantucket Pequot Nation in Canada to develop a thesaurus, based on Mashantucket epistemology, for their museum and research center. Launched in 1995, the thesaurus project (Littletree and Metoyer 2015, 641) was “designed to be user-centered and to reflect the information-seeking behavior of Native and non-Native scholars and researchers who conduct research on American Indians.” In New Zealand, Māori knowledge organization practices have featured relatively prominently in the emerging field of inquiry into indigenous knowledge organization. Work on the Māori subject list began in 2005, and a year later the Nga Upoko Tukutuku online thesaurus was launched (Lilley 2015; Te Rōpū Whakahaui 2016). The headings are included in the New Zealand National Bibliographic Database as authorized headings. Waikato University adapted and revised sections of the LCC by inscribing and re-ordering topics to reflect and serve Māori communities, readers, and researchers. Whereas the LCC classes Māori as ethnographic subjects in New Zealand history, the Waikato version removes the ethnography designation and asserts the agency of Māori people in New Zealand’s society and history. It also adds a number of topics that are absent in the LCC (Adler 2016). By claiming certain spaces for local history within a universal system, the Waikato classification is not only a decolonizing gesture, but an assertion of rights and access to knowledge and an act that facilitates seeking and discovery of knowledge in ways that more accurately reflect Māori perspectives and interests.

The inherent impossibility of reparative measures to fully compensate for the trauma and legacy of slavery, conquest, and patriarchy signal the challenges of such efforts, and for some individuals and communities this incommensurability precludes reparation. Exemplary of this failure is the Sioux nation’s demand for the return of the Black Hills land, Paha Sapa, in South Dakota. The Sioux do not recognize the confiscation of the Black Hills by the U.S. federal government as legitimate, and the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973 was centered on the de-

mand of the return of the land to the Sioux. After a decade of protests, the U.S. Supreme Court determined that the land had been taken illegally and ordered that \$106 million be paid. This remuneration was refused on the grounds that the Sioux believe that acceptance would validate the theft of their land (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014, 206-7).

As with reparations for African Americans, this case shows that past damages are not only irresolvable, but certain reparations actually rely upon and reify categorical differences produced in the past. Critics also argue that reparations are inadequate to address the psychological and symbolic components of the problems. The recent reparative turn among queer scholars provides some insight into these dimensions.

### 5.0 Reparation and queer theory

A number of LIS scholars have used queer theoretical approaches to expose heteronormativity and the exclusion and marginalization of queer subjects in KO systems. In 1990, Ellen Greenblatt provided a thorough account of the inappropriate and inadequate treatment of gay and lesbian subjects in *LCSH*, and subsequently, researchers have identified problems inherent to the structure of universal knowledge organization systems oriented around assumed heterosexuality and patriarchy. Some have discussed the efficacy of social tagging for representing and accommodating queer subjects, and others have identified specific limitations of description and access in LC name and subject standards (Adler 2009; 2012; Keilty 2009; 2012; Roberto 2011; Billey, Drabinski and Roberto 2014). Queer theory exposes the political and cultural situatedness of categories for gender and sexuality, and reveals that the very notion of naming subjects and organizing them into rigid structures fails queer subjects and users. To demonstrate heteronormativity in taxonomies, queer studies scholars frequently use historical methods to examine the processes by which categories for gender and sexuality have become naturalized.

Some queer theorists have taken a decidedly “reparative turn,” which is generally viewed to be influenced by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and by a wider affective turn across critical theory. As Grant Campbell (2000, 126) has explained, Sedgwick’s 1990 *Epistemology of the Closet* is highly relevant for thinking about knowledge organization, particularly for her assertion that an “underlying definitional distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality structures thought in modern Western culture.” Sedgwick’s shift toward reparative reading derived in part from her readings of Melanie Klein’s psychoanalytic research, which explained states of mind in terms of object relations. Sedgwick (2002) provides a series of questions that drive her inquiry into reparation: “What does knowledge *do*—the

pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows? *How*, in short, is knowledge performative, and best does one move among its causes and effects?” (emphasis Sedgwick’s, 124). We can certainly extend this line of questioning and ask what knowledge organization does. What do the names and structures do before, during, and after the acquisition of knowledge? How do they influence its circulation and reception, and what are the consequences? Is it possible that reparative taxonomies might facilitate and support the kinds of reparative, pleasurable, and ameliorative readings that Sedgwick is after? A reparative taxonomy would be one that embraces the emergence of new, buried, marginalized and discarded knowledges, with the understanding that what it means “to know” is always changing and contingent.

Klein (1937, 1940) believed that as infants grow, they assemble an inner world of objects, in which the mother is the central figure. Processes around love, guilt, and reparation originate in infancy and continue into adult relationships. Klein suggested that reparative work takes place when one resides in a depressive position, in contrast to what she called a paranoid position. Whereas the paranoid position produces the sense that one is under attack, a person in a depressive position is capable of seeing the other and operating in a social world. Sedgwick (2002) takes this as a useful division for conceptualizing queer critical practice, suggesting that critical thinking has become too routinely paranoid. That said, scholars have increasingly observed that the differentiation between paranoid and depressive readings is not so stark, and arguably, paranoid, aggressive readings that unearth injustice and violence are essential for reparative thinking and projects to succeed. Sedgwick is careful to point out that Klein does not suggest that reparation will result in a preexisting object. As with reparations for racialized wealth and rights disparities, there is nothing to suggest that repair will mean that conditions will resemble something of the past. Rather, the hope is that reparation will lead to something more durable, nourishing, and satisfying.

In plainer terms, reparation is an approach to reassembling one’s world after loss, whether that loss is the death or leaving of a loved one or the loss of one’s own material or psychical well-being. As Robyn Wiegman (2014, 11) explains, Sedgwick views reparation to be “about learning how to build small worlds of sustenance that cultivate a different present and future for the losses that one has suffered.” Wiegman (2014, 14) notes that the queer feminist scholars, Heather Love and Elizabeth Freeman, cite Sedgwick’s reparative practice as the impetus for their own queer historical projects, recognizing their turn toward history as necessary to “affectively nurture the present.” Indeed, in Love’s reading of Sedgwick’s

essay, reparation is “on the side of multiplicity, surprise, rich divergence, consolation, creativity, and love. If reparative reading is better at the level of ethics and affect,” writes Love, “it also looks better at the level of epistemology and knowledge” (237). José Esteban Muñoz (2006) perhaps provides the most relevant explanation of Klein’s approach for thinking about how reparation might function in knowledge organization practice:

Utilizing Klein as a theorist of relationality is advantageous because she is true to the facts of violence, division, and hierarchy that punctuate the social, yet she is, at another moment, a deeply idealistic thinker who understands the need to not simply cleanse negativity but instead to promote the desire that the subject has in the wake of the negative to reconstruct a relational field.

Kleinian reparation applies in and across personal, societal, and minoritarian lines. Arguably, it also foregrounds the ways in which we are in processes of becoming sexualized and racialized subjects, in relation to others and the categories that order our world.

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick also touches on the concept of “nonce taxonomies,” which she describes as “the making and unmaking and remaking and redissolution of hundreds of old and new categorical imaginings concerning all the kinds it may take to make up the world” (23). Sedgwick privileges taxonomies that are never meant to be stable, rational, uniform, or universalizing over those that divide the world into normative categories. She suggests that people who have experienced oppression need and possess “rich, unsystematic resources of nonce taxonomy for mapping out the possibilities, dangers, and stimulations of their human social landscape” (23). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word “nonce” means, “For the particular occasion; for the time being, temporarily; for once.” Indeed, nonce taxonomies—multiple, local, makings, remakings, and revisions—are one way to conceptualize and do reparative work, particularly if the unmaking and remaking consciously resists and counters the dominant, normativizing taxonomies. These may come into formation by privileging the blurred lines, the intersections, or discomfiting knowledge that resists categorization altogether, and they highlight the emergent, changing nature of knowledge, especially about sexuality and gender.

There is no question that nonce taxonomies present particular problems for information search and retrieval. The recently launched Digital Transgender Archive, a project led by K.J. Rawson, seems to embrace this approach to emerging and contingent categories. Recognizing the temporal and geographic specificity of the term “transgender,” the archivists are explicit in their aims, scope, and defini-

tions, and they directly confront the challenges derived from describing emerging and local knowledges in a global context. The Archive’s stated purpose is to “increase the accessibility of transgender history by providing an online hub for digitized historical materials, born-digital materials, and information on archival holdings throughout the world,” but it recognizes the limitations and potential of using the term “transgender” for a global system. I quote the organization at length to convey the scope of these tensions:

While “transgender” is now widely used in contemporary U.S. culture, the term is not only culturally specific, but it is also only a few decades old. In an archival context, this very recent emergence of the term means that any materials processed before the 1990s would not include the term in descriptive information. Throughout the world, many other terms are used to describe trans-related practices, often in ways that are both temporally and contextually foreign to a U.S.-based understanding of transgender ... It’s important to note that the DTA uses transgender in an expansive and inclusive analytic sense, not simply as a fixed identity term. Though the term transgender is widely used as a broad identity category in the U.S. (though not without controversy), the term does not adequately capture the gender diversity that exists around the world. Consequently, we use transgender and trans as a framework for collecting materials, as a point of departure, so that we can work toward developing deeper understandings of practices of trans-ing gender on a global scale.

The Digital Transgender Archive’s response to the differences across locales is to provide a single gateway to “disparate archival collections, digital materials, and independent projects with a single search engine” (<https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/about/overview>). The controlled vocabulary used and developed by the Archive is called the “Homosaurus.” Originally produced by the International Homo/Lesbian Informaticentre & Archives and compiled by Jack van der Wel in 2013, K.J. Rawson and colleagues are revising the “Homosaurus” to be more trans- and bi-inclusive and to function as a linked data vocabulary. I view this project as a reparative one as it confronts the challenges of trans terminologies, while connecting people and knowledge around the world. It is produced by queer and trans-identified people and consciously holds users’ and subjects’ desires and needs in mind in its descriptive practices and works directly with partner institutions and organizations that collect transgender-related materials.

## 6.0 Conclusion

Problems of inequality are inherently classification problems. Investigating heteronormativity, colonization, and racism in knowledge organization systems from the standpoint of reparation might help to raise consciousness about the role of classification in the distribution and access to knowledge but also power and wealth. One could argue that the conventions based on assumed whiteness, patriarchy, colonialism, and heteronormativity have persistently and unevenly barred people from accessing information related to identity and history.

Whereas critique exposes the fictions of universal classifications, reparative reading and creative thinking can help us to reconfigure and reassemble objects in relation to ourselves and others in ways that heal and redistribute the wealth of knowledge in our libraries, archives, and museums. There is no ideal form or site for reparative taxonomies. They already exist in many locations and take a variety of forms, and we have yet to invent all the possibilities for this kind of work. Creating many reparative taxonomies and consciously acknowledging them as such can collectively chip away at the dominant structures that order knowledge in ways that do harm. They can function as liberatory descriptive standards, as suggested by Harris and Duff. Consciously framing knowledge organization theory and practice as a form of activism for social justice means that we reject any notion of neutrality and actively seek ways to remedy the inequities in access to and production of knowledge through categories deployed in the guise of a neutral, objective point of view.

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