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Over the past few decades, a sizeable body of library and information science literature has pointed to the inadequacies of traditional cataloging and classification systems for describing material related to marginalized communities. At the same time, alternative metadata systems have proliferated in online environments and social tagging has become almost ubiquitous. Focused specifically on the retrieval of LGBTQ+-related recreational reading materials, this study used an online survey to assess the utility of traditional library systems in comparison with the utility of the user-moderated folksonomy employed in the Archive of Our Own (AO3) fanwork repository. Results indicated that respondents, who were generally comfortable in both the library and Archive environments, preferred using AO3 to access LGBTQ+ material and perceived the tagging system to be of greater value in search processes than typical subject access mechanisms. Several possible avenues for improving current systems emerge in the conclusion of the paper.

Headings:

      Fan fiction

      Libraries & LGBT people

      Reading as recreation

      Subject access in online library catalogs

      Subject cataloging -- Evaluation

RETRIEVAL OF LGBTQ+ RECREATIONAL READING MATERIAL: A
COMPARATIVE STUDY

by
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Introduction

Though modern English-language library classificatory systems and controlled vocabularies are continually tweaked, altered, and updated, a substantial body of scholarship has nevertheless shown that these systems are frequently fraught with bias and representational inaccuracies (see, for example, Adler, 2017; Olson, 2001). Beyond the inherently problematic nature of a biased system of assigning metadata, these inaccuracies in representation will also necessarily lead to difficulties and inaccuracies in information retrieval. Problems with classification of LGBTQ+ related materials, in particular, have been studied extensively, with wide implications (Adler, 2017; Olson, 2001; Johnson, 2010). Investigations have generally concluded that current classification systems—particularly Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)—are not adequately inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community (defined here as including people who self-identify as part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer communities; or who otherwise see themselves as a gender or sexual minority). For users searching for LGBTQ+ content, this inadequacy adds an extra layer of difficulty to the information retrieval process.

Fortunately for these LGBTQ+ users, online systems have been developed that provide alternatives to the restrictiveness of traditional controlled vocabularies. Social tagging is extremely prevalent, both outside traditional library catalogs and within these systems themselves. Previous research has delved into the relative utility of a variety of tagging systems in library catalogs or on platforms such as Goodreads and LibraryThing

(Adler, 2009; Lu, Park, & Hu, 2010; Rolla, 2009). Some of this previous work (such as Adler, 2009) has even specifically considered tagging practices of queer (used in this paper as a synonym for LGBTQ+) content. This study, then, is an expansion on this previous body of work. This paper is concerned with a set of tagging and classification practices that are not as frequently subject to academic inquiry: the organizational system of a web-based fanwork repository, fanwork defined here as a piece of media (a story, artwork, etc.), usually created by a fan without intention of profit, directly inspired by another piece of media and often reusing that original media's characters or setting. Having surveyed 150+ LGBTQ+ adults, this work examines the utility of a moderated social tagging system in comparison with traditional subject headings when used for retrieval of queer recreational reading objects online. This work builds off the inquiry of scholars such as Ludi Price and Julia Bullard, who have devoted recent articles and dissertations to the intersections of information science and fan studies—and done some of the critical work of collocating these two disciplines (Price & Robinson, 2016; Price, 2017; Bullard, 2017).

Though studies of fans within information and library science are relatively uncommon, there is a long history of fans acting as their own digital catalogers and archivists online.[1] Online fan repositories serve populations of all ages, interests, and backgrounds; they vary widely in size, scope, and quality. Though many fanworks are uploaded to sites whose permanence is unknown—an enormous body of fanfiction

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[1] As examples, both LiveJournal and FanFiction.net have been active since the 1990s; smaller sites dedicated to one fandom, many no longer extant, predated these two larger repositories. Wattpad, Tumblr, and AO3 all date to the mid-2000s. See Jamison, 2013 for discussion of the history of fanfiction.

resided on now-dormant LiveJournal blogs in the first decade of the 21st century—many other creators take great care to publish their work to reliable and sustainable platforms, meticulously cataloging their productions with complex metadata and tagging systems. Perhaps the most well-known contemporary repository is the Archive of Our Own. AO3, as it is commonly known, is a project of the Organization for Transformative Works—"a nonprofit organization run by and for fans to provide access to and preserve the history of fanworks and fan cultures."[2]

While they may enjoy serving as their own pseudo-librarians, fans primarily visit fan sites for social purposes (Price & Robinson, 2016). Internet fandom is often perceived as a safe recreational space for teens and adults who may not know people in real life who share a particular obscure cultural interest. Members of marginalized groups can frequently find themselves represented in fandom to a degree not seen in mainstream media productions.[3] This is especially true of LGBTQ+ people, due in no small part to the popularity of same-sex pairings within many fan communities (Binstock, 2016; Hu, 2016; Niehaus, 2014). Many fan spaces are deliberately inclusive: AO3 has been analyzed as an example of embedded feminist HCI (Fiesler, Morrison, & Bruckman, 2016), and there are countless examples of individual fans curating their own webpages to express support for queer people.[4] In focusing on LGBTQ+ adults, then, this research

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[2] http://www.transformativeworks.org/about_otw/, accessed October 26, 2017.

[3] It should be highlighted that fandom is clearly not a haven for all marginalized groups, but addressing the complexities of all fan experiences is unfortunately outside the scope of this paper.

[4] This support ranges immensely. Among One Direction fans on Tumblr, for example, it is common practice to include a small rainbow heart in your profile image to indicate your support for Rainbow Direction, a fan initiative dedicated to "making fandom a safe and enjoyable place for LGBTQ+ fans with education, action and visibility!" (http://takemehomefromnarnia.tumblr.com/, accessed September 24, 2017). Users of platforms that allow for customized profile pages may include a rainbow flag or banner on their profile, or they may highlight a statement such as "love is love".

project is a deliberate study of connections between classificatory systems and, critically, a population that those systems are theoretically designed to support. I examined use of the moderated folksonomic tagging system of AO3 to answer the question: When assessed in comparison with typical (Library of Congress Subject Heading) systems of classifying content, does the use of AO3's moderated tagging system lead to LGBTQ+ users reporting greater ease and satisfaction when searching for recreational reading material online? This project has implications for how fan and non-fan platforms employ tagging as a tool for user search and object retrieval. Data collected points to strengths or weaknesses of how different tagging and classification systems serve users searching for recreational reading material about marginalized groups or individuals.

Background: Metadata and Tagging at the Archive of Our Own

To provide context for this work, it is necessary to provide brief background on the Archive of Our Own. Approximately a decade old at the time of this writing, AO3 was founded in 2008 after a 2007 proposal for "An Archive of One's Own" that reflected growing concerns in fan communities about commercial entities profiting off their labor as well as a desire among fans for their work to be preserved and documented ("An Archive of One's Own", 2007). Over the course of 2007 and 2008, volunteers began building the infrastructure for the parent Organization for Transformative Works and AO3; both have grown enormously since that time. Though the Archive is technically still in an open beta, it currently hosts over three million fanworks and has over one million registered users.

While AO3 is broadly fascinating as a successful volunteer archival project, this study is focused more specifically on the tagging and metadata structure of the site. As Bullard explored in her dissertation work, the Archive is a "successful large-scale user-driven classification design project" (2017, p. 74). The tag-oriented metadata system for works uploaded to the site was designed and is continuously maintained by a team of expert volunteers. As is the case with any folksonomy, users (in this case, authors) are free to add any tags they wish to their own content. Where AO3 differs from most systems, however, is in its large-scale behind-the-scenes system of "tag wranglers": users who work to synonymize, canonize, and otherwise curate user-generated tags. The AO3 Wrangling Guidelines explain:

"The idea is to standardize canonical tags and synonym relationships as much as possible, while keeping in mind that different fandoms (and people) organize information about their fandoms differently. The aim, then, is not a perfect tagging scheme, but clarity, differentiation between similar tags with different concepts, prevention of single tags with different meanings, and ease of use for as many people as possible."

For folks who work as wranglers, the Archive has published a seven-part set of pages that provide extensive documentation on how to approach the process. Bullard (2017) has provided a thorough explanation of AO3 tags and wrangling; a brief description will suffice here.

AO3 has four kinds of tags: Fandom, Character, Relationship, and Additional tag (Freeform tags). When posting a work, the interface prompts authors to sort their tags by category. For authors, the work of tagging their piece is then complete. In the background, however, tag wranglers take over, continuously updating tag structures and hierarchies in a multistep process that moves tags from free text to systematically categorized. Tag wranglers:

- Assign canonical tags, a single master tag meant to group a set of tags that refer to the same concept.

- Synonymize tags, creating the grouped tags under a master tag.

- Disambiguate tags, e.g. adding text to canonical tags to distinguish between the fandoms for a book versus the movie of the same name.

- Create parent tags and child tags, categorizing and grouping specific tags (children, e.g. a character) under fandom or media type (parents).

- Produce metatags, high-level tags that group together similar (but not synonymous) tags to allow searchers to use one tag to retrieve a wide variety of related works.[5]

These wrangled tags are then used in the AO3 search and browse functionalities. Users are provided with interfaces to browse fandoms and browse or search works, bookmarks, and tags themselves. An advanced work search feature allows for complicated queries to locate fanworks, including searching by all tag types—the interface lists canonical tags for selection as users begin typing in tag fields (see Appendix D for an image of the tag search component). The main search bar at the top of any AO3 page is a keyword search, but prompts the user to include different filters as desired (e.g., words:>10000). When users click on a tag on any part of the site, they are presented with a list of works tagged with that tag or one of its synonyms or metatags. Within these specifically tagged results, they are also provided a complex set of sort and filter options (Appendix E). In essence, the Archive's robust filter and search options are all underwritten by the tag system and the efforts of the tag wranglers.

There are a few other functionalities of AO3 that are more tangential to the work of this study, but were mentioned frequently in survey responses. Alongside user-generated and wrangler-mediated tags, there are other pieces of metadata that the Archive considers "tags": authors can assign their work a rating (from General Audiences to Explicit) and can provide select "Archive Warnings" for content like graphic violence. They can also optionally class their work by primary kind of relationship present, with

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[5] Several of these wrangling practices, clearly, are similar to the authority control that takes place in the construction of the LCSH system.

choices for several combinations of same-gender or heterosexual pairings (along with a

"Gen[eral]" option). Additionally, though this study is focused on retrieval of works

within the Archive's main search systems, users can also add tags to their personal

bookmarks, which are searchable by all users.

As this study is about tags relating to LGBTQ+ material, it is worth noting that

AO3 provides explicit instructions about how to handle metadata architecture related to

identity issues. The Wrangling Guidelines state:

> "DO NOT make tags synonyms when dealing with people's identities
> unless you are absolutely sure that you are doing so appropriately. If you
> aren't sure, ask the list or leave it alone. If you come across an identity
> term that you aren't familiar with, definitely leave it alone. This includes
> national, ethnic, racial, sexual, gender, and religious identities, and
> probably other categories as well."

Tag wranglers, then, are encouraged to act with an abundance of caution when it

comes to creating metadata for LGBTQ+ material.

Finally, AO3's primary guiding principle for tag wrangling was critical to the

logic underlying this study: "The purpose of tags is to help users find works"

("Wrangling Guidelines"). Somewhat similarly, in their documentation for Researchers,

the Library of Congress indicates that:

> "The primary purpose of LCSH [Library of Congress Subject Headings] is
> to provide standardized English-language subject category terms that can
> be used to bring together in convenient groups the literature of the world--
> no matter how great its variation in title keywords, and no matter what the
> original language of the works being cataloged--so that materials on the
> same subject can be noticed and retrieved together" ("Doing Research at
> the Library of Congress", 2016).

The spirit of findability made so explicit at AO3 is present in this mission. Price (2017)

also assessed the two entities as parallel creations as she stated: "tagging – on AO3 in

particular – becomes an important finding aid, similar to the subject headings found in

library catalogues, except that [tags] are far more granular and far more numerous" (p.

274).

Literature Review

This study has its roots in a diverse body of information science and related literature.

User-centered Cataloging and Alternative Classification Systems

Though the history of cataloging and classification is far too lengthy to explore in its entirety here, the history of potential disruptions to traditional cataloging methods is comparatively brief. For several decades, authors have framed standard cataloging practice as a problem for user experience—yet the very discussion of this problem over multiple decades indicates that it is an issue that has yet to be adequately addressed. As Hoffman (2009) described it, cataloging has traditionally been unique in the library world in that established standards are not effectively designed to allow for user needs to be met: controlled vocabularies and reliance on individual catalogers for any appropriate customizations of classifications have not made for an effective system. Other authors point to the particular dubiousness of these traditions in an online environment. Bates (1986; 1989) was an early voice in discussions about the potential of online searching, and was in particular an early proponent of uncontrolled vocabularies to serve user needs (1989). Alemu et al. (2011) took up this call in later decades, framing collaborative metadata formation and social tagging as a social constructivist approach to cataloging.

Thus, while classifying using Library of Congress Subject Headings remains hegemonic in the library world, there is a significant quantity of recent library and information science (LIS) literature that considers the potential of alternative

collaborative classification systems for both retrieval and description online: most authors

have concluded these studies by recognizing the positive prospective impact of tagging,

while also acknowledging one or more caveats that prevents them from replacing

traditional cataloging systems. Speller (2007) provided an early example of this

assessment of alternative classification systems: in an extensive review of then-existing

literature, she suggested that alternative classification is both useful and problematic from

several perspectives, including quality control and specificity. Though a number of

platforms have been considered since her 2007 report, the largest number of researchers

have specifically assessed tags users have added to records in LibraryThing, a social

platform for cataloging of personal libraries: Rolla (2009) argues that due to differences

in how catalogers and users label material, tags can enhance, but not supplant, traditional

subject headings. Lu et al. (2010) had a similar finding: they recognized that social tags

can improve collection accessibility, but also suggested that unregulated erroneous tags

may be problematic for library catalogs. Kipp and Campbell (2010) and Steele (2009)

were more moderated in their approach, suggesting that users find utility in both tags and

traditional classification systems. Pirmann (2012) considered LibraryThing tags from a

usability perspective, and had a different objection than earlier authors: while tags

enhance subject access, current search system design does not adequately support

retrieval of items based on tags.

These cautious yet curious findings were not exclusive to research on

LibraryThing: Thomas et al. (2009) used a variety of platforms to come to the similar

conclusions, arguing that the use of folksonomies in library catalogs augments patron

access alongside LCSH. However, while the question of "Are tags useful?" has

seemingly been discussed extensively, there is no body of literature that addresses the utility of moderated social tagging systems, or specifically the system in use in the Archive of Our Own. Further, most authors do not entertain the possibility that tags can be of great utility on their own, without the underlying structure of a standard classification system within a library catalog. This paper begins to address both of these gaps.

A few researchers have considered alternative classification systems beyond simple questions of utility. Yi and Mai Chan's work (2009) attempted to collocate tags and Library of Congress headings and therefore assumed that there might be some utility in bringing order to tags via an established classification scheme; this attempt to network different classification systems is not seen in other papers, but the authors still relied on LCSH as the most acceptable standard. Adler (2009) considered LibraryThing tags and LCSH specifically with regards to transgender-themed materials; she found a relatively substantial divide between tags users assigned in LibraryThings and subject headings assigned with LCSH, but echoed other work in suggesting that neither is effective on its own. Finally, Bates and Rowley (2011) asked deeper questions, echoing the weaknesses of standard classification systems described in the second section of this literature review. Writing from the UK, they found that LibraryThing user tags are also subject to bias (albeit different ones) and do not entirely serve as a solution to problems of social exclusion found in typical classification systems. Given the relative scarcity of studies of this type, however, more research about the practical and social implications of tags within and outside of library systems is needed; this study participates in this area of research.

Cataloging for Marginalized Populations and Subject Access for LGBTQ+ People

Apart from Adler's 2009 study, most examinations of alternative classification systems were not domain-specific. Classification complications, however, are very often particular to a field or group of fields, and classification of LGBTQ+ materials in particular is a particularly fraught topic. The rapid changes in terminologies and identity politics attached to these items present an enormous challenge to traditional classification methods that are under bureaucratic management. Though Sanford Berman first brought issues of bias in LCSH to the fore in 1971 (Berman, 2014), the majority of research pertaining to the complexities of cataloging materials that relate to marginalized groups has appeared in the last two decades. Several modes of inquiry have emerged, and a few key authors (such as Adler, Olson, Roberto, and Drabinski) have been responsible for much of the growth in scholarly research on these topics.

The fundamental outcome of this increase in inquiry is that the scholarship has unconditionally recognized the shortcomings of LCSH (see Drabinski, 2013, for an excellent explanation of the cementation of this process). There still, however, exists a significant body of work that aims to further establish how these subject headings fail at representation of marginalized bodies and provide potential solutions to the problem. Authors such as Christensen (2008), de la Tierra (2008), and Greenblatt (2011) have recently written short essays that introduce the problems of LCSH and reflect on the progress of the past, and then continue calling for change to come from the Library of Congress itself. Johnson (2008) took a slightly different approach in that he emphasized the utility of GLBT (his term) thesauri for retrieving material, offering examples of more flexible controlled vocabularies. Very few scholars, however, have considered the

potential of uncontrolled vocabularies or moderated uncontrolled vocabularies (such as that in use at AO3) for queer subject access.

In the last few years, researchers have also begun exploring cataloging and subject access concerns from densely theoretical perspectives. Drabinski (2013) convincingly employed a queer theoretical framework to suggest that one should provide users with the tools to engage with extant metadata systems as biased texts, as an all-inclusive unbiased classification system is an impossible goal. Adler (2017) drew on queer theory to craft her comprehensive monograph about the history of knowledge organization as it relates to sexuality, persuasively arguing that Library of Congress subject headings have reinforced mechanisms of social power that other practitioners of non-normative sexual behavior. It is likely that critical theoretical approaches to cataloging and classification practice will grow in import in the coming years. As this paper is focused on how users engage with classification systems, it is engaged with this theoretical literature while also keeping practical usability at the fore.

Fan Studies and Library and Information Science

It is only recently that fanfiction and fan studies have arisen as appropriate topics of scholarly interest, but in the past few years several emerging scholars have dedicated articles, dissertations, and theses to intersections between the disciplines of fan studies and information and library science.[6] This significant intellectual work has legitimized the inclusion of fans in serious study of LIS.

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[6] The Fan Studies Network—visualized as "an international friendly space in which scholars of fandom could easily forge connections with other academics in the field"—was founded only in 2012. (https://fanstudies.org/, accessed October 16, 2017).

Some of this research has been relatively wide in scope. Price and Robinson (2016), drawing on the early stages of Price's dissertation study, described their investigative project on fan community information behavior as a whole. Price recently completed the study that resulted from this extensive investigative project and published the most comprehensive existing study at the intersection of fan studies and LIS; her 2017 dissertation aimed, quite broadly, "to explore the information behaviour of cult media fan communities" (Price, 2017, p. 9). In this text, Price constructed a multi-faceted model of fan information behavior that took into account fannish activities across the web; her results specifically relevant to tagging are discussed below. Koven-Matasy (2013) also broadly considered the overlap between fandom and LIS, from a different angle. Her findings suggested that there were both social and (limited) professional benefits for librarians who participated in fan culture.

Most researchers, however, have tackled a smaller subset of fan products or a particular aspect of fandom culture, and a few threads emerge in the literature. Gursoy (2015), Daw (2015), and Lothian (2013) all considered the archival potentials of fanworks, though Lothian wrote from a cultural studies perspective rather than an LIS lens. Both Gursoy and Daw suggested that fan materials have a valuable role to play in archives, while Lothian troubled ideas of what can and should be archived through a lens of critical theory. This research, while of little apparent practical relevance for this paper, serves to endorse fanworks as a useful point of LIS inquiry.

More relevant to this study, some previous authors have specifically considered questions about tagging, particularly as part of Master's level research projects. Dalton (2012) performed exploratory research on the utility of the tagging structure of the

Archive of Our Own, tentatively arguing that users perceived it as reasonably valuable.

Donkar (2007) attempted to establish the existence of consistent vocabularies within a fan

community on the now-defunct platform Delicious, and found that patterns and trends did

in fact emerge. Price, as part of her expansive doctoral research (2017), analyzed tagging

practices within a specific fandom on Tumblr, AO3, and Etsy in an attempt to explore fan

tag usage patterns; she supplemented her analysis of a large dataset with interviews with

tag creators. This subsection of her findings indicated that, related to the efforts of tag

wranglers, "tags on AO3 were more effective bearers of information than on the other

sites investigated" (p. 275). Most substantially, Bullard (2016a, 2016b, 2017) also studied

AO3 in her dissertation research, using its tagging methods as a means to consider

classification design. Bullard spent several years embedded a researcher within the

volunteer "tag wrangler" army of The Fanwork Repository (a pseudonym she uses to

refer to AO3). From this position, she analyzed the design decisions of these volunteers

and argued that "designers have an important role in creating the values or bias of a

classification system" (Bullard, 2017, p. v). These previous considerations of tagging are

of incredible utility for the framing of this paper. However, no previous research has

investigated the utility of fannish tagging practices for a particular subset of users; this

paper adds breadth to this growing body of scholarship.

Historiography and Potential for Future Work

Finally, it should be noted that over the past three decades a few critical edited

volumes have been produced that tackle the intersections of subjects highlighted above in

this review. While some individual chapters have already been cited, considering these

texts as a whole provides a key window into the historiography of this project and allows

for succinct visualization of the scope and trajectory of the most relevant body of LIS literature for this project.

Gough and Greenblatt's book (1990) was an early voice in discussions about how to best provide service for LGBTQ+ library users; it was not until the late-2000s that other book-length texts were produced addressing similar concerns. Greenblatt herself published a substantially revised version of this book twenty years later (2011a). Content changes from the earlier edition are evident in a change in name: what was called *Gay and Lesbian Library Service* in 1990 became *Serving LGBTIQ Library and Archives Users* in 2011. Both volumes included chapters that addressed bibliographic access alongside topics such as collection development and professional resources for queer librarians—but in 2011, for example, transgender issues were covered much more extensively, while several chapters on AIDS-related materials for potential circulation were no longer included.

Alongside Greenblatt's work, Emily Drabinski's groundbreaking ongoing series (as editor) on "Gender and Sexuality in Information Studies" has produced several volumes relevant to this project: Dean and Keilty's (2013) *Feminist and Queer Information Studies Reader* gathered a wide variety of papers that look at LGBTQ+ concerns in LIS as a whole, while Wexelbaum's (2015) *Queers Online: LGBT Digital Practices in Libraries, Archives, and Museums* focuses in on digital space. The market for materials addressing queer subjects in LIS has clearly broadened since 1990, and perhaps even since 2011: the specificity and number of volumes in this series allows Drabinski's authors and editors to cover much more ground in greater detail than

Greenblatt was able to. The success of this series is perhaps an indicator that LIS practitioners and scholars are, as a group, growing more concerned with queer issues.

Finally, unrelated to either of the above collection sets, Roberto (2008) brought together essays that considered specifically cataloging problems and means of addressing them. While *Radical Cataloging* considers questions of race and religion alongside reflections on gender and sexuality, the volume in its entirety points to a newly increased scholarly engagement with the shortcomings of LCSH—as this intervention in the discourse on cataloging appeared almost 40 years after Sanford Berman's earliest publications that brought the issue to the fore (Berman, 2014).

Alongside the chapters, books, and articles considered above, these seminal edited volumes have done important work in establishing the validity of the areas of study surrounding this project, and interest in LGBTQ+ subject access concerns is increasingly visible. The investigation of how queer populations (and, of course, other marginalized groups) engage with information is, however, still an intellectual space ripe for growth—especially since, as established in the second section of this literature review, the language around queer issues is in near-constant flux. This paper is meant as a contribution to this scholarly space.

Methodology

Though (as described above) there exists an existing body of work that tackles various intersections of tagging, LGBTQ+ materials access, LIS, and fandom, the limits of previous research on fanfiction repositories in particular mean that this work is exploratory in nature. This study collected data through a survey administered online via the Qualtrics platform (Appendix A) to answer the question: do users report higher ease and satisfaction in searching for recreational reading materials online in typical LCSH systems or in moderated tagging systems (specifically that in use at the Archive of Our Own, or AO3)? This survey consisted of both closed-response and open-response questions, and was designed to be completed in approximately 20-40 minutes.

Participant Recruitment

The survey was distributed through online social networks. Koven-Matasy (2013), writing about the intersection of fandom participation and careers in librarianship, created a Tumblr blog for the sole purpose of dissemination of her master's paper survey. She explained Tumblr's particular utility for a survey of this type:

> "[Tumblr] combines the community-building aspect of social media (different users "follow" each other's accounts in order to view their posts on an aggregated "dashboard" and can "like" or "reblog" specific posts in order to show their interest or approval; in the case of reblogging the original post will then be shown on the dashboards of all the followers of the user who reblogs it, with any additional commentary that user sees fit to provide) with topical discovery (posts can be tagged, and those tags can be searched or "tracked" by users who are interested in a particular topic)." (p. 14)

Considering the success of Koven-Matasy's approach (she had more than 150
usable responses), I created a Tumblr account (@findinglgbtqmaterial) from which to
disseminate the tagged survey recruitment post (Appendix B). I included an actual photo
of myself as the blog's avatar in order to legitimize the young account, and my contact
information was available at the link to the survey. The post was tagged with terms
related to the research as well as names of top fandoms from 2017 as determined by
Tumblr's algorithms and published by Tumblr; theoretically, users from all over Tumblr
were able to serendipitously find the survey.[7] To begin circulating the survey, I shared the
original Tumblr post through two different longstanding personal Tumblr blogs, one of
which is devoted to LGBTQ+ literature and has a sizeable following of similarly-themed
blogs. Through reblogs by interested parties and serendipitous browsing, the survey then
circulated far outside my own social sphere and fan communities; at the time the survey
closed, the post had over 300 "notes", meaning 300 blogs had either liked or reblogged it.
Only approximately 5 of these notes originated from bloggers whom I personally know.

I also created a Twitter account (@clairecpayne) to disseminate the survey.
Twitter is useful for essentially the same reasons as Tumblr with regards to this study, but
generally used by a broader population than Tumblr. In fitting with the norms of the
platform, the profile included a photo of me and a very brief academic biography of
myself. Due to character limits, the short call for participants included fewer tags than the
Tumblr post and was only tagged #fanstudies (Appendix C). I first retweeted the Tweet
on my personal account, and from there it gained a modest degree of traction. It was

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[7] As of this May 2018 writing, this top fandom information is available at
https://thefandometrics.tumblr.com/tagged/tumblr2017.

retweeted 16 times before the survey closed; in marked contrast to the Tumblr spread, I knew about half of these disseminators personally.

Had the survey not effectively spread organically, I had planned to contact particular "high profile" members of fandom online to ask them to share the survey to their own networks as well. The benefits of sharing the survey instrument in these specialized networks were weighed against the potential problems with this approach: using fandom-specific recruitment ran the risk of concentrating survey respondents within a particular fandom or fandoms; the limitations of this are described below. Ultimately, this technique was unnecessary: the sample was a blend of a convenience and snowball sample, fitting with the exploratory nature of the research.

Survey Design

Participants who clicked the link to the survey (Appendix A) were first presented with three screening questions asking them about their age, then reading habits. If participants reported that they were under 18, or reported that they do not use the library and/or do not search for recreational reading material using AO3 at least once every six months, they were directed to the end of the study. If participants were over 18 and did use the mechanisms of interest in this study, they continued on to the body of the survey. Recruitment materials made clear that this survey was intended for readers of queer material, but participants faced no screening questions about sexual identity as I did not wish to gate keep or make participants uncomfortable about not "qualifying" for the survey.

Survey questions asked participants about their experiences searching for LGBTQ+ reading material on AO3 as well as on their local library platform. The first set

of questions covered the habits and preferences of participants with regards to all fanfiction and traditional fiction as well as LGBTQ+-themed fanfiction and traditional fiction. The second set of questions concerned participants' search behaviors. Half of participants then saw a set of questions that asked them to recount and provide feedback on certain specific search practices, while the other half was given two brief retrieval tasks and asked questions about their experience with the tasks. The next set of questions asked all participants about their past experiences with tags and subject headings specifically. The final section of the survey collected demographic data pertinent to assessing survey results. Participants were asked for their age range, gender identity, sexual orientation, and primary language. Apart from the multiple-choice age ranges, all of these questions were open-ended. As was the case with the rest of the survey, no questions required a response. Participants were also asked about their primary fan community or communities, to ensure that not all responses come from a single fandom that may have particular tagging practices skewing the entire study. No location or IP address information was collected from participants, and all responses were completely anonymous.

Data Analysis

The survey remained open for two weeks, from February 17, 2018, to March 3, 2018. At the time it closed, the Tumblr post was updated to note that it was no longer accepting new responses, and an additional Tweet was threaded to the original for the same purpose. 301 people began the survey, and 209 technically completed it. Of these 209, 151 answered affirmatively to all three screening questions and therefore filled out the body of the survey. These participants spent an average of about 19 minutes

completing the survey.[8]

Closed-response questions provided some numerical insights into the perceptions and behaviors of participants. Responses to all open-ended questions—including demographic data—were inductively coded preliminarily by hand; codes were then refined using Nvivo qualitative data analysis software. Due to the highly specialized vocabulary used in both the survey and in many responses—including many fandom acronyms, portmanteaus, and platform-specific terms, as well as terms related to gender and sexuality with which a lay reader might not be familiar—a second coder was not used.

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[8] This number is controlled for outliers who appear to have left the survey open for several hours (while almost certainly not actively engaged in responding).

Findings

Demographics

Though only limited demographic data was collected, it is useful to here make a few notes about the general spread of study participants. 91% of participants (138) were between 18 and 34 years of age, and no participants were aged 65 or older. 132 participants (87%) answered that English was the language they used most frequently to communicate; six participants used English and another language (Spanish [2 participants], Portuguese, Brazilian Portuguese, Japanese, and Russian). Two participants used Finnish most frequently, and two used Norwegian. Czech, Danish, German, Haitian Creole, Italian, Polish, and Spanglish were each used by one respondent.

Of 149 people who responded to the open-ended question "How would you describe your gender identity?", only 12 described themselves as male or men. 54 participants explicitly identified themselves as cisgender, while 15 identified as nonbinary. Sizeable numbers of participants identified as trans (14), genderfluid (6), and genderqueer (5); five noted that they were to some degree questioning their gender identity. By far the largest number of participants used female, woman, or girl to describe their identity (97; 65% of the population that responded to this question).

The question "How would you describe your sexual identity?" was similarly open-ended; all 151 participants responded. Many participants additionally differentiated between their sexual identity and their romantic identity in their response to this question. Most notably, only four participants identified as straight or heterosexual; it can be fairly

stated that survey participants were overwhelmingly queer. There was, however, wide variation in the terms used by the remainder of respondents. 60 participants identified as "bi" or "bisexual". Large factions also described themselves as lesbian (32), asexual (27), and queer (23). Two respondents indicated that they use one word (such as "bisexual") to keep things simple when describing themselves, but would ideally attach more nuanced identity terms to themselves; this is an interesting concern to note given its intersection with this study's interest in terminology and descriptors as means of access.

Though no question in this survey asked about racial or ethnic identity, several participants self-identified as people of color in their responses to other questions.

Fan Communities Represented

Participants were asked of which fan community or communities, if any, they had particular knowledge. Responses indicated that participants were active in a wide number of fandoms, with no single fan community appearing in more than 25% of responses.[9] The vast majority of participants also listed two or more fandoms.

Recreational Reading Behavior

In order to properly contextualize information about searching practices, participants were asked about their reading habits. Respondents spent a considerable amount of time reading fiction, with 64 respondents (42%) spending more than ten hours a week reading fiction of any kind for pleasure (see Table 1). Participants also reported spending more time reading fanfiction than traditionally published fiction.

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[9] Harry Potter was mentioned by approximately 25% of respondents, all but one of whom also listed one or more other fandoms.

Table 1. Reading habits.

In an average week, how much time do you spend reading [material type] for pleasure? (n=151)							
	0 hours	**0 to 2 hours**	**2 to 4 hours**	**4 to 6 hours**	**6 to 8 hours**	**8 to 10 hours**	**More than 10 hours**
Fiction of any kind	0%	4%	17%	9%	18%	11%	42%
Fanfiction	1%	19%	16%	17%	15%	8%	24%
Traditional fiction	1%	35%	26%	17%	4%	9%	8%

97% of all respondents indicated that it was somewhat or very important to them that fiction they chose to read featured LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and/or experiences. The most common reason given for this importance was that the respondent was LGBTQ+ themselves (58) (Table 2). This interest was reflected in participants' chosen reading materials (Table 3), with fanfiction featuring LGBTQ+ characters more frequently than traditional fiction.

Table 2. Responses about featuring LGBTQ+ experiences.

Why is it very important to you to see LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and/or experiences featured?	
Reason	**Count**
Reader identifies as LGBTQ+	58
Provides representation of LGBTQ+ identity	52
Experiences are relatable	24
Lack of interest in straight stories	23
Lack of previous access to LGBTQ+ fiction	15
Educational about LGBTQ+ folks	10
Reader has interest in LGBTQ+ stories	8
Self-actualizing for reader	7
Provides joy for reader	7
Provides normalization of LGBTQ+ experiences	7
General ubiquity of straight stories	6
Stories help build community	6
Helps reader build empathy for characters	5
Provides distance from unpleasant reality	5

Reader has seen bad queer characters in other experiences	5
Narratives are good/important for others to read	5
Narratives are realistic	5
Narratives are validating	5
Helps build understanding	5

Table 3. LGBTQ+ character prevalence.

How often does [material type] you read for pleasure feature LGBTQ+ characters? (n=151)					
	Never	**Rarely**	**Sometimes**	**Often**	**Very often**
Fiction of any kind	0%	5%	21%	33%	40%
Fanfiction	0%	1%	4%	13%	82%
Traditional fiction	3%	38%	31%	20%	9%

Systems Familiarity

This survey found that respondents are fairly familiar with the systems used to organize material in AO3 as well as how one approaches searching these systems (Tables 4, 5, and 6). A remarkable 117 respondents (77%) answered affirmatively that they had written fanfiction in the past, 83 of whom (55% of total respondents) had published work on AO3. 79 of these AO3 creators mentioned that they had tagged their work on the platform, indicating that over half the participant sample (79; 52% of total) had experience in creating the type of AO3 metadata under consideration here. Only 4 participants, however, had ever served as a tag wrangler, and only 24 (16%) agreed that they had "a great amount" of knowledge about the AO3 tagging system when presented

with the Wrangling Guidelines. [10]

On the whole, a total of 126 respondents (83%) indicated that they felt "very comfortable" searching AO3, with only one individual replying that they were "not at all comfortable" with the system.

Table 4. Systems familiarity.

Systems Familiarity			
	Yes	**No**	**I'm not sure**
Have you ever written fanfiction? (n=151)	77%	22%	1%
Have you ever published anything on AO3? (n=151)	55%	45%	0%
Did you tag your publication? (n=81; "Yes" respondents to above question)	98%	1%	1%
Do you have an AO3 account? (n=151)	89%	10%	1%
On AO3, do you know what a "tag wrangler" is? (n=151)	46%	29%	25%
Have you ever served as a "tag wrangler"? (n=69; "Yes" respondents to above question)	6%	94%	0%

Table 5. Tagging system knowledge.

Tagging System Knowledge (n=151)				
	Yes, a great amount	**Yes, somewhat**	**Yes, I've heard of it**	**No, not at all**
Do you feel that you have knowledge of the AO3 tagging system as detailed in the Wrangling Guidelines?	16%	51%	23%	10%

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[10] Participants were directed to the Guidelines at https://archiveofourown.org/wrangling_guidelines; similar information is available in the Archive FAQ under "Tags" https://archiveofourown.org/faq/tags.

Table 6. Searcher comfort levels.

Searcher Comfort Levels (n=151)			
	Not at all comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Very comfortable
What is your comfort level with searching for fanfiction using the Archive of Our Own?	1%	16%	83%
What is your comfort level with searching for traditional fiction using your preferred public or academic library website?	7%	51%	42%

In contrast, participants were less familiar with their library search systems and subject headings as used for retrieval (Tables 6 and 7). 82 participants (54%) responded that they knew what a subject heading is in the library context; only 64 participants (42%) identified themselves as "very comfortable" searching using their preferred public or academic library website. 27 (18% of total) agreed that they had "specialized knowledge" of subject headings: though they were not asked to identify the specifics of their situation, responses to other questions indicate that the participant pool included a number of library staffers, booksellers, and researchers.

Table 7. Subject heading familiarity.

Subject Heading Familiarity			
	Yes	No	I'm not sure
Do you know what a subject heading is? (n=151)	54%	21%	25%
Imagine you are looking at the entry for a book in a library catalog. Do you know where to find that book's subject headings? (n=120; "Yes" and "I'm not sure" respondents to top question)	68%	13%	19%
Do you have any specialized knowledge of subject headings? (n=81; "Yes" respondents to top question)	33%	67%	n/a

Search Behaviors

  Frequency. Participants search both their preferred library website and AO3 relatively frequently, and search for fiction featuring LGBTQ+ characters quite often. 83 participants (55%) search their library website at least once a month, while even more participants engage in AO3 searches on a regular basis: 141 people (93%) used the Archive to search at least once a month (Table 8).

Table 8. Search frequencies.

How often do you search for… ?							
	At least once a day	At least once a week	At least once a month	At least once every 2-3 months	At least once every 6 months	At least once a year	Never
…traditional fiction on your preferred library website(s)? (n=151)	3%	15%	38%	24%	15%	5%	1%
…traditional fiction featuring LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and/or experiences on your preferred library website(s)? (n=150)	2%	11%	29%	24%	19%	4%	11%
…fanfiction on AO3? (n=151)	36%	38%	19%	3%	3%	0%	0%
…fanfiction featuring LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and/or experiences on AO3? (n=151)	31%	40%	21%	6%	3%	0%	0%

  Stated preferences. When searching for works that features LGBTQ+ characters,

themes, and/or experiences, 115 respondents (76% of total) indicated that AO3 is their

preferred platform over their local library online catalog. The most common reasons

provided for this preference are seen in Table 9. Most often, the rationale did not relate to

search practices, but rather pointed towards the nature of the material available on AO3.

One respondent of these 56 summed up that attitude succinctly: "AO3 has a wider

selection of gay content". However, a significant number of respondents attributed their

preference in part to the quality of AO3's tagging system (22) or the quality of the search

structure (15), which is inherently supported by the tagging system. 23 ascribed their

preference to the limitations of traditional library search systems. Comments of this

nature pointed towards several elements of the AO3 system:

> "Ao3's breadth of material, wonderfully tagging system, and summaries are
> far more likely to yield up material I actually want to read. Because fics tend
> to be thoroughly tagged, I'm able to carefully sort out stories that feature
> precisely the sort of plot I'm craving…"[11]

> "The Ao3 tagging system, both the default (such as labeling m/m and f/f
> pairings) and user-generated (such as "POV bi character or "coming out")
> make finding specifically LGBTQ stories very easy. For traditional fiction I
> often have to know titles and authors before I can start searching."[12]

> "AO3 seems more organized for LGBTQ+ purposes. My library's way of
> searching is very clearly designed by a heterosexual person. It's great that
> they're proactive in including LGBTQ+ literature in their collection, but the
> search abilities of AO3 are vastly superior. I can specifcally search for very
> specifc types of fanfiction, whereas with the library it's more hit or miss."

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[11] All quotations are drawn directly from participant responses and therefore may include minor errors in
spelling and grammar.

[12] M/M and F/F refer to same-gender male and female relationships, respectively.

Table 9. Reasons for AO3 preference.

Why is [AO3] your preferred platform?	
Reason	**Count**
Reason related to available content (e.g., abundance of LGBTQ+ narratives)	56
Ease of use of the platform	25
Limitations of library systems	23
Quality of AO3 tagging system or tags	22
Reason related to other affordance of AO3 (e.g., bookmarks, instant gratification)	18
Specificity of search possible	18
Quality of search system	15
Ability to search by pairing or character	10
Expected satisfaction with search	9
Ability to filter out unwanted material	6
Pre-existing comfort with system	5
Ability to search by preferred tags	5

One respondent noted a difference in the kind of content they sought on AO3 versus in library catalogs, but still identified an important distinction between the metadata practices of the two systems:

> "I'm not sure these two are easily comparable, since on AO3 I am looking for specific characters and pairings, so my approach is quite different. But traditional library catalogues often have searchable information that is only tangentially relevant for recreational reading (i.e. year published), but have no proper tagging system for content. For instance, searching for the term "lesbian" on my local library's catalog gets me 3 results, even though I know they have more relevant content."

There were seven participants who registered a preference for their library's website or catalog to find LGBTQ+ fiction. Four of these respondents preferred the type of content available at the library, for material or quality-related reasons. Two broadly found the system easier or were more used to it. One respondent provided a stellar review for their local library that points towards potentially more comprehensive than normal metadata

practices: "My library system is very inclusive, so I get good results for traditional fiction."

Self-reported participant use of tags and subject headings. When asked about searching using tags and subject headings directly, it is clear that participants make use of tags on AO3 much more frequently than they do subject headings in library catalogs (Table 10). Of 151 survey takers, 105 use tags related to gender and sexual identity when searching, whereas 39 use subject headings related to gender and sexual identity in the library setting.

On AO3, 60 respondents (40%) indicated that they use tags for purposes besides searching for material (Table 11). The most common additional purpose supplied (20 users) was using tags to get information about the work or help them make a choice about what to read: "When I do not search for specific works, I always read the tags to see what the work is about, since you sometimes can't tell from the description." 19 participants mentioned that tags help them avoid certain themes or filter out material they don't want to read: "I also use them to filter out content I don't want to see!" A few participants indicated an interest in tags that goes beyond the purely functional: one responder uses tags for "Statistical analysis of fandom works, done for funsies." Notably, 14 participants also responded that they use informational tags as they *produce* content, and eight participants authored tags designed to be less informational: "I'll often tag my own works with things like "whatamIdoing" or "Ihopeyouenjoythis", as it's just a little bit more self expression that the readers get to see from the author. Gives me a little more joy in publishing works." For some searchers, this is a source of frustration:

> "See, the reason why I dont rely on anything beyond basic character &
> relationship tags while searching is that tags are 1) hugely variable-and I don't

want to miss a story by narrowing things down too much, and 2) An expressive medium, like tumblr when people just "talk in the tags". Artistically it's fun, and it offers information on the story, but tagging that way is useless when conducting searches for new material."[13]

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[13] For additional findings on the variability in AO3 tags, see "Searching in Practice" below.

Table 10. Tag and subject heading use in search.

Tag and Subject Heading Use In Search					Tag and Subject Heading Use In Search: Frequency					
	Yes	**No**	**I'm not sure**			**Never**	**Rarely**	**Sometimes**	**Often**	**Very often**
Do you use tags when searching for new recreational reading material on AO3? (n=151)	91%	6%	3%	*if yes*	**How often do you use tags? (n=137)**	1%	4%	18%	23%	55%
Do you use tags related to gender or sexual identity to find new recreational reading material in AO3? (n=137; "Yes" respondents to above question)	77%	20%	3%	*if yes*	**How often do you use tags related to gender or sexual identity? (n=104)**	0%	12%	33%	32%	24%
Do you ever use subject headings while searching for new recreational reading material? (n=81; question only asked of participants who responded that they knew what a subject heading is)	65%	27%	7%	*if yes*	**How often do you use subject headings when searching? (n=53)**	0%	13%	49%	26%	11%
Do you use subject headings related to gender or sexual identity to find new recreational reading material? (n=53; "Yes" respondents to above question)	74%	25%	2%	*if yes*	**How often do you use subject headings related to gender or sexual identity when searching? (n=39)**	0%	15%	46%	23%	15%

Table 11. Other uses of tags.

Other Uses of Tags	
Use	**Count**
Getting information about a work or making reading choices	20
Avoiding or filtering out unwanted content	19
As author, providing information about a work	14
Providing trigger or content warnings	9
Writing Tumblr-style tags (e.g., "sorry I wrote this at 3am")	8
Cataloging own work	1
Bookmarking works	5
Performing formal or informal research	4
Exploring them for amusement	3

Only 14 participants use subject headings for any purpose besides searching. Six of those participants use subject headings in some kind of professional capacity—and in at least one instance, only in a professional capacity: "I upload material in my job, so I use subject headings to categorize things. When I search, I typically use keywords." Four participants use subject headings to get a sense of what a book is about.

Examined granularly or holistically, these participants report that they use subject headings much less frequently and employ headings for fewer purposes than AO3 tags.

Searching in Practice

The limitations of library systems suggested in participants' stated preferences were reiterated in the portions of the survey that requested that participants recount their personal practices for finding new fiction to read, both general and LGBTQ+ specific. Half of all survey respondents (randomly assigned) were presented with these questions. The most common strategies mentioned for browsing for any new material in a library catalog are seen in Table 12. Subject headings were included as part of the strategy of

only three participants; three participants also mentioned using tags at their library. One

respondent describes:

> "when searching for traditional fiction at a library I don't browse, I am there
> looking for something specific, or browsing within an author. So I search by
> title and author almost exclusively. I find browsing traditional library catalogs
> less than enjoyable and prefer browsing the shelves when I'm just looking."

The trends were not significantly different when participants were instructed to describe

their practices of browsing for LGBTQ+ material using the online catalog (Table 13).

Though many respondents did not answer this portion of this question, those that did

most frequently mentioned searching for a known title (19). Keyword searches and

subject searches were mentioned only by three participants each.

Table 12. Library search strategies, all content

Library Search Strategies: Any Content	
Strategy	**Count**
Search for a specific book	31
Search for a known author	21
Use outside recommendations	21
Goodreads	*8*
Word-of-mouth/general interpersonal	*7*
Librarian	*6*
Keyword search	16
Search by genre	13
No strategy, just frustration	8
Use built-in algorithmic recommendations	7
Read summaries	7
Browse new books	5
Use search filters	5
Use Google for help	5
Use set categories in a system like Overdrive	5

Table 13. Library search strategies, LGBTQ+ content.

Library Search Strategies: LGBTQ+ Content	
Strategy	**Count**
Search for a specific book	19
Use outside recommendations	10
Use set categories in a system like Overdrive	7
Read summaries	6
Keyword search	3
Search for a known author	3
Subject search	3
Use built-in algorithmic recommendations	2
Look at course reading lists in a university library	1
Use filters	1
Browse shelves virtually	1

Subjects were asked about what they like about this search process for LGBTQ+ material and what they find frustrating. Though five participants had positive comments about the general search system at their library, and two appreciated the keyword functionality, the number of frustrations was much higher (Tables 14 and 15).

Table 14. Positive aspects of library search.   *Table 15. Frustrations with library search.*

Reported Positives of Library Search	
Positive Aspect	**Count**
Reason related to available content (e.g., quality)	6
Functionality of general system	5
Availability of algorithmic recommendations	2
Functionality of keyword search	2
Ability to Search by genre/section	2
Existence of set categories	1
Functional/useful metadata	1
Availability of reviews and ratings	1
Availability of subject headings	1

Reported Frustrations with Library Search	
Frustration	**Count**
Unhelpful metadata	17
Difficulty in finding good results	9
General dislike of search system	9
Searching is unreliable	7
Can't search by category	6
Set categories exist but are unhelpful	6
Searcher has to know what they want already	3
General dislike of catalog design	2
Filtering options are not useful	1
Too many results/information overload	1
Search results are irrelevant	1
Unhelpful recommendations	1

17 participants noted that the kind of metadata available for fiction was unhelpful, with many of these participants expressing frustration that metadata gave no hints as to what a work was about or if it even featured queer themes.

> "I don't like anything about searching my library catalog for LGBT+ content; it contains no substantive data about what a given work is about. Ebooks might be slightly better, since those usually come with a plot description, except the libraries I have access to have poorly organized ebook catalogs. For

instance, under "gay & lesbian" (which is a pretty ghettoized category to begin with) there is exactly 1 (one) title listed in both libraries, since apparently books with LGBT+ content that are also gen lit, or fantasy, or whatever other genre, are listed only under their main category. Basically, if you don't know what you're looking for specifically, you're out of luck."

"I've seen a few categories of LGBT Fiction before but I think that was only for gay pride month/events. When those categories exist it's GREAT because I don't always find good recommendations. The frustrating part is how much is still not advertised as I wish it would be so that I could know it's queer fiction. I understand that some writers don't want to label their character's identities or they don't want the book to be focused primarily on gender and sexuality when other important things are happening but like- so much of my town's society isn't accepting of queer people. I want to feel comfortable somewhere. If you don't make it known that your book has queer themes or characters, I'm probably not going to read it."

Nine participants broadly noted that the queer fiction was difficult to find within existing search systems, and an equal number of participants also registered a general dislike for the search system. Others had more specific complaints. Six participants indicated that they'd like to be able to search by some kind of hierarchical category system, and six mentioned that an LGBTQ+ tag or categorical scheme does exist but is not helpful or inclusive:

"The LGBTQ+ books are not under an 'LGBTQ+ section' but rather, in the 'diversity' section, because of this, it can be difficult to find an LGBTQ+ book. It is frustrating that the LGBTQ+ section is the smallest part of the 'diversity' section, which is, not coincidentally, the smallest section of the website's library."

Participant processes for browsing for new material to read on AO3 were very diverse, for both all material and LGBTQ+ material. The most common strategies employed for general searching are visible in Table 16. One participant helpfully illustrates several different approaches:

"Go to the list of works for the fandom I want to read about. Just scroll through them if I'm not looking for a specific relationship, or maybe search for works in the category F/F or M/M (though in most fandoms the majority of fic is queer anyway so this step is often not required). If I am looking for a specific relationship, I go into the tag for that ship, or open up the dropdown list of relationships in the sidebar and select the one I want. I select "language: english". I sometimes leave the results in the default "date updated" order, sometimes I sort the results by "number of kudos" (for fic a lot of people have liked), by "number of bookmarks" (for fics people have been especially fond of) or by "number of comments" (for fic that readers find very engaging). If I feel it's necessary with this particular tag, I may also go into the "search within results" field and exclude some tags. I sometimes tick "completed works only". Sometimes select for works of a certain rating. Sometimes go into the "other tags" box and search for a certain trope I want to read, e.g."soulmate au"."

Table 16. AO3 search strategies, all content.   *Table 17. AO3 search strategies, LGBTQ+ content*

AO3 Search Strategies: Any Content	
Strategy	**Count**
Use custom filters (e.g., a specific tag)	38
Browse works	27
Begin filtering process within fandom tag	27
Use pre-set filters (e.g., Rating)	22
Use relationship tag type to search	19
Use sorting options	16
Begin filtering process within a relationship tag	15
Read descriptions of works	11
Use fandom tag type to search	10
Chain from known works	6
Read tags	6
Begin filtering process within an author	6
Begin with an advanced search (as specified by respondent)	5
Use character tag type to search	5
Search by tag (type not named)	5
Begin filtering process within particular tag (type not named)	5

AO3 Search Strategies: LGBTQ+ Content	
Strategy	**Count**
Use relationship tag type to search	9
Search by tag (type not named)	9
Use custom filters (e.g., a specific tag)	8
Use pre-set filters (e.g., Rating)	8
Begin filtering process within fandom tag	5
Browse works	3
Use character tag type to search	3
Begin filtering process within a relationship tag	3
Use sorting options	2
Begin with an advanced search (as specified by respondent)	1
Chain from known works	1
Read descriptions of works	1
Read tags	1
Use fandom tag type to search	1
Rely on serendipity	1
Use recommendations	1

Search foci shifted slightly when participants were instructed to describe their practices

of browsing for specifically LGBTQ+ material using AO3 (Table 17). Though many

respondents did not answer this portion of this question, those that did most frequently

mentioned direct search options, rather than filtering broader results. Like with catalog

searching, subjects were asked about what they like about this search process for

LGBTQ+ material and what they find frustrating (Tables 18 and 19). Though on balance

positive comments outweighed frustrations (15 people had no complaints at all, as

opposed to the five respondents who liked their library's search process), there were

notably 17 responders who were frustrated by some aspect of the *unreliable* (rather than

unhelpful, as was the case in the library system) metadata of AO3:

> "It's hard to strip out all the stuff you don't want. It's an ocean and people cross tag when they shouldn't. No. Your single mention of my ship doesn't warrant a tag and now I hate you a little. I like that tags give you a good portrait of what to expect."[14]

> "The tagging system is both useful and frustrating. Useful when everything's properly tagged, frustrating when it's not."

> "I like that there's a more detailed tag infrastructure, and if I see a new-to-me tag I can click to see if anyone else has used it. I like being able to search for more sexuality options and that I often have a stronger sense of what I'm going to get based on kudos/bookmark counts. I find it frustrating that lots of content has overly chatty tags that are more like the author talking than helpful in search functionality."

Eight respondents also remarked that they would like better or different ways to filter

search results.

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[14] "Ship" here refers to the romantic relationship about which the participant prefers reading.

In contrast to this, 13 respondents explicitly lauded the tagging system as something they liked—including many (as seen above, too) who take some issue with the system:

> "Tags! The concept of clicking a tag and being able to find a wealth of different works in the same vein is amazing. The only thing that can be frustrating is when you want to go reread something and it's been deleted, but that's not really AO3's fault."

> "… I like how you can be as broad or specific as you want. I like how you can exclude works. I like how tagging is something everyone does: you don't have to pore over the blurb trying to figure out if it's actually got any LGBT content, the tags tell you exactly what to expect…"

> "I honestly don't find anything frustrating. I like how many ways there are to search the catalogue, I like the advanced search interface, and I adore the tagging system."

The most common reason that participants listed for liking the AO3 LGBTQ+ material search process was simple: 23 people noted, as one participant phrased it, that "searching on AO3 is very easy."

Table 18. Positive aspects of AO3 search.

Reported Positives of AO3 Search	
Positive Aspect	**Count**
Easy to use	23
Overall functionality of platform	15
Tagging system	13
Possible specificity of search	7
Detail of metadata (WYSIWYG)	7
Design of search system	6
Features in filtering system	5
Ability to search by tag	3
Ability to search broadly	2
Expected satisfaction of search	2
Ability to search by pairing	2
Pre-existing user comfort with system	1
Ability to eliminate tags	1
Use of ingroup language in tags	1
Availability of warning system	1

Table 19. Frustrations with AO3 search.

Frustrations with AO3 Search	
Frustration	**Count**
Metadata is unreliable	17
User desires better or different filters	8
Search process is arbitrary	2
User can't always find what they want	2
Works are tagged incompletely	2
Dislike of Tumblr-style narrative tags	2
Dislike of symbols on platform	1
Desired tags used infrequently by authors	1
Works are tagged inconsistently	1
Warning system is not used consistently	1

A Search Exercise

A second group of participants not asked about their general search processes were asked to complete an exercise in both their library's catalog and on AO3. In both systems, they were instructed to find a list of works that featured a bisexual character. Participants were asked if they were successful, roughly how long the task took them (they were told to take no more than seven minutes), how they proceeded through the task, and if they found the task difficult (and why or why not).

Differences emerged between the two platforms (Table 20). 57% (43 people) of this half of the sample reported that they were successful in generating the list at their

preferred library—though, considering some of the details in the processes they recount, the actual number is likely lower. Of those who claimed success, 57% were able to execute the task in less than two minutes. The majority (85%) searched a public library.

In the Archive environment, all but one participant responded affirmatively that they succeeded at the task—and the remaining individual was not sure either way. Of those who claimed success, 79% took less than one minute to perform the task; 97% took less than two minutes. Participants reported a wide variety of strategies and constraints in their search processes on both platforms (Tables 21 and 22).

Table 20. Search task results.

Search Task Success and Duration							
	Did you succeed at this task? (n=76; n=75)			Approximately how long did this task take you? (n=75; n=42)			
	Yes	No	I'm not sure	Less than one minute	1 to 2 minutes	2 to 5 minutes	More than 5 minutes
Library	57%	28%	15%	12%	45%	38%	5%
AO3	99%	0%	1%	79%	19%	3%	0%

43/66 people who attempted to search their library systems described using some form of keyword search: by far the most popular strategy. Several individuals mentioned metadata as part of their processes: 11, for example, filtered by genre (fiction) after their keyword search, and six tried to use some kind of tag. Only five participants mentioned using subject searches of any kind, and only one named a formal subject heading (though later referred to the named LCSH as a tag).

On AO3, a plurality of participants also used a keyword approach: 31/70 simply typed some variant of "bisexual" into the search bar at the top of the page. Nearly as many searchers, however, used some kind of advanced search feature: 28 overall, 23 of

whom mentioned searching tags specifically. The keyword approach also would have

searched through tags, and, as one participant expressed very succinctly, the simple

keyword search might work more effectively on AO3: "AO3 actively encourages

generous tagging, which readily facilitates this kind of searching." Because of how tags

are complexly synonymized and given metatag attributions, a tag search provided more

expansive results than a similar subject search in a library catalog, as one participant

suggests (though perhaps has not entirely internalized):

> "I scrolled down to tags to search for and input "bisexual character" and
> "bisexuality." The list I ended up with included works that were tagged
> "bisexual character" or "bisexual male character," but also those that were
> tagged for specific characters, e.g. "bisexual Harry Potter.""

Table 21. Results of catalog search task.

Searching the Library Catalog	
Element of search	**Count**
Used a keyword search	43
Retrieved irrelevant results	12
Filtered by genre	11
Got no results	6
Results were of unknown relevance	6
Used tags to search	6
Categories/genres were not inclusive (e.g., only "gay/lesbian")	5
Used subject headings	5
Unsuccessfully tried subjects or categories	4
Results were not exhaustive	3
Used a custom filter	3
Got very few results	2
Filtered by format	2
Tried to browse	2
Couldn't find catalog on website	1
Didn't know how to approach doing task	1
Used an algorithmic suggestion	1

Table 22. Results of AO3 search task.

Searching AO3	
Element of search	**Count**
Searched in search bar (keyword search)	31
Performed advanced search or used custom filters (not enough detail provided to distinguish in most responses to this question)	28
Searched by tag	23
Used "any field" search option	4
Searched by character or relationship	7
Used filters within a certain fandom	3
Refined search with tags	2

The majority of participants did report that the library task was not difficult (40/63) (Table 23). Reflecting on the AO3 search, however, 66/68 respondents stated that the task was not difficult (Table 24). Reasons given for the difficulty of the library search were varied, but only three related to the difference in queer material available on that platform. Several people commented again on the metadata provided for fiction in online catalogs: "It was frustrating to figure out if the books in the search results were actually what I was looking for," said one participant, while another reflected on the limits of existing categorizations in noting the task was hard "because even if there is bisexual character in a book in library it would still be tagged under homosexuality, or lesbianism." 14 participants who said the task was not difficult in their library catalog were still unhappy with the results of their search "Not too difficult," said one, "but there was an uncertainty that the results accurately reflected my goal." At the other end of the spectrum, 16 participants attributed the easiness of the AO3 search to that platform's tagging system: "The results were quick and all tagged to verify that they contained exactly what I wanted."

Table 23. Results from library search task, reflections on difficulty.

Searching the Library Catalog: Difficulty	
Result	**Count**
Difficult	22
Not difficult	40
Not difficult, but results not ideal	14
Due to familiarity with system	4
Due to experience as a librarian	3
Not difficult, but did not succeed	2

Table 24. Results from AO3 search task, reflections on difficulty.

Searching AO3: Difficulty	
Result	**Count**
Difficult	0
Not difficult	66
Due to tagging system	16
Due to familiarity with search system	11
Not difficult, but search has limitations	4
Due to search system design	4
Not difficult, but user felt information overload	2

Discussion

Within these extensive data, several themes emerged as prominent. First, in one key aspect this study's participant base was fairly homogenous: these AO3 and library users were avid readers for whom representation of their own narratives and experiences in their reading material was of considerable importance. Though they read more fanfiction than traditionally-published fiction, many participants consumed significant quantities of both types of material. For those who spend such a significant amount of time reading, modes of access to material are inherently critical.

In both the library and Archive contexts, these participants were also not amateur users; many had a systems-level understanding of the online interfaces that facilitate their retrieval particularly for AO3. Questions about their searching behaviors indicated the frequency with which participants engage in online retrieval of recreational information objects: any widespread difficulties that these users had with searches could be fairly assumed to be at least in part problems with a system, and not problems with user familiarity with that system.

Survey participants also overwhelmingly preferred AO3 as a platform for searching for LGBTQ+ recreational reading material. While the *mechanics* of searching were not mentioned by the majority of participants with either stated preference, AO3 was lauded substantially more frequently on this front than were traditional library catalog systems, and traditional systems were actively denigrated for their structure by a not inconsequential number of respondents.

The results illustrated in Table 10 point to participant use of tags and subject headings, and were indicative of additional findings about search behavior: in AO3, participants like using tags; they make sense to users. When users are looking for something specific related to LGBTQ+ identity (e.g., a piece of fiction featuring a bisexual character), the tags allow them to find it. Their general browsing practices almost always make use of tags either directly or indirectly via search filters that are underwritten by the tag wrangling system. In this participant group, then, many fewer searchers reported employing subject headings in their searches for recreational reading material, both when performing a search prescribed by me and when recounting their typical search practices. Numbers of library searchers using subject headings in actual search practice were even lower than what would be expected based on answers about general frequency of subject heading use. It is evident that for these respondents, when it comes to retrieving LGBTQ+ fiction, AO3 tags spring to mind as a useful tool while subject headings are barely used. Users reported that AO3 searches are easier to execute and far less frustrating.

Some of these discrepancies in search strategies and satisfaction could perhaps be explained by relative searcher familiarity with these two systems: as noted above, this population is on the whole more comfortable with AO3 and uses AO3 more frequently than a library catalog. Indeed, in the prescribed AO3 search for a list of works with a bisexual character, 11 searchers highlighted their familiarity with the system as a reason for its ease. However, even of *just* those respondents who identified as "very comfortable" with searching their library catalog, only 70% stated with certainty that they succeeded at the library version of this task. Of those respondents who stated that they

were very comfortable searching AO3, 98% reported success on that platform. Considering that these anonymous users had no reason to exaggerate their search prowess, it seems fair to assume that differences in search success can be attributed at least in part to the type of searches facilitated by system design.

One rather unexpected finding of this study was the degree to which frustrations about metadata would emerge in both the library and AO3 contexts. In the library context, participant grievances were largely anticipated: it is well-established that subject headings typically do not do a good job facilitating access to queer material. It could additionally be predicted that participants would sometimes find the amount of information supplied about items to be lacking. However, a surprising number of participants expressed frustration with the system in place at the Archive, indicating that they engage with tag metadata at a thoughtful level. A sizeable minority of participants pointed out that AO3 metadata, created by authors if wrangled by experts, is unreliable; some folks do a better job of tagging their content than others. If a work is only tagged "Harry Potter", wranglers cannot add a "Bisexual Ron Weasley" tag even if it is accurate. At the other end of the spectrum, users faced frustration when an author would tag for an element that appears only in the background of a plot: while there may technically be a "nonbinary character" present in the work, a passing mention of that person may not warrant advertising their presence in the tags.

One particular aspect of AO3 tagging that does not have a neat library parallel is the ability to search by character or pairing. When asked to recount their typical search strategy for finding LGBTQ+ content, the most mentioned strategy was searching by character pairing: that is, when a user wanted to read about a gay couple, rather than

searching "gay" they were more likely to search something like "Harry Potter/Draco Malfoy". In the library context, on the other hand, users were most likely to search for a known title. Though character-centric metadata would be impossible to replicate for original fiction, some kind of "queer" attribute is also captured via that tag. It *would* be possible to provide that kind of descriptive metadata in a catalog; it seems likely that currently users do not attempt to access material via this kind of subject heading because these thematic headings do not often exist.

Finally, the findings of this study provided evidence that subject-specific material access in the Archive of Our Own is made possible via several other affordances of the platform that are rarely duplicated in library systems. AO3 works are for the most part indexed by search engines, and therefore retrievable by keyword even outside of the site. Additionally, authors and readers have the same kind of accounts on the platform, so users can easily click through to other works that a writer they like has bookmarked: rather than relying on outside platforms for recommendations for LGBTQ+ material (as many library users indicated they did), recommending can happen within the networks of the site itself. The existence of a sort of trusted community of fans writing works, creating bookmarks, and leaving comments and kudos was integral to many users' experiences with the site. As one respondent put it: "everyone I know who likes to read the same material as me also uses AO3 more than any other [online platform]." Though some library catalogs have a social component, it seems unlikely that the same sort of congenial environment often develops.

Limitations

There are a few limitations of this study. First, the exploratory nature of this work and convenience recruitment methods precluded the performance of complex quantitative statistical analysis on data collected. While the results are not technically generalizable, the qualitative analysis performed certainly provides evidence for the utility of an alternative tagging system and indicates a potential framework for future research about retrieval of LGBTQ+ objects. Additionally, it is unknown what racial and socioeconomic diversity are reflected in the final data; it is possible (and perhaps even probable) that conclusions may stem from skewed perspectives.

There are also complexities that stem from analyzing fanfiction and "traditional" fiction as parallel creations. This questions in this survey were very deliberately designed to measure not differences in content between repository types, but rather usability differences in how that content is described through tags and subject headings. While AO3 almost certainly has relatively more LGBTQ+ material than a typical library, that does not mean that more standard libraries should have no concerns about how this material is located by users: it is, after all, an ALA core value that "All information resources that are provided directly or indirectly by the library, regardless of technology, format, or methods of delivery, should be readily, equally, and equitably accessible to all

library users" (American Library Association, 2004).[15] It was made clear to survey participants that these questions were not asking where they go to look for LGBTQ+ recreational reading material, but rather how they look for it in any given repository; many responses, despite these clarifications, indicated a concern with the former issue and were not particularly helpful to answer this study's research questions.

In a similar issue of attempting to compare two not-quite-equal entities, not all online public access catalogs look alike or have the same functionalities: there will likely be differences in how one searches a university catalog, for example, versus a small public library catalog. For the purposes of this study it was assumed that the underlying structures of the vast majority of library systems are similar enough that broad strokes conclusions can be drawn about subject access. Only a few situations challenged this assumption: one respondent repeatedly answered questions about search process with the statement that their local library did not even have an online catalog, and a few others were clearly using BiblioCommons (or similar) catalogs that greatly increased the robustness of the search system. For the most part, the library catalogs that respondents were discussing seemed to share similar information architectures. Additionally, while this study attempted to consider subject headings specifically (as this was assumed to be a facet that would be present in almost all library systems), very few respondents used the word "subject heading" when referring to their search processes. As such, the findings and discussion sections of this paper focused more broadly on subject access in library

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[15] Tumblr and AO3 user toastystats/destinationtoast has collected extensive statistics on fandom. Though the data on queer content on AO3 is several years old, in 2013 nearly half of fiction hosted on the site was labeled as including at least some queer content (http://archiveofourown.org/works/1026854, accessed October 27, 2017).

catalogs, as that is what survey respondents seemed to take "subject heading" to mean.

Lastly, as a person with significant insider knowledge about LGBTQ+ and fan cultures, I have a vested interest in the topics under discussion in this paper. I am aware of my own biases and made every effort to word survey questions as neutrally as possible; questions were reviewed by an advisor, fellow graduate students, and the Institutional Review Board. While I made use of my fandom familiarity and my own networks to recruit for this study, I also (successfully) made a concerted effort to reach queer fans outside of my own online communities so that data was not only reflective of insular fandom-specific tagging practices.

Conclusion

Though we live in an era in which same-sex marriage is legal across the US, LGBTQ+ people still face significant legal and social challenges. While useful metadata may not lead to absolute liberation, it *can* go a long way towards making queer folks feel recognized and valued by their libraries—and, critically, it is a key means of providing access to the representative and validating stories deemed so important by survey participants.

The results of this study clearly indicate that the metadata assigned by authors and wrangled by volunteers at AO3 makes the LGBTQ+ materials search process easier for users and allows them to experience satisfaction with results. Typical library subject access systems seem to lag behind. Though this study focused on this particular marginalized population, it is not unreasonable to suggest (and further research could indicate) that there are more effective subject access mechanisms than headings for material related to other oppressed populations.

While many might argue that the classification system in place at the Archive of Our Own is not transferable to a broader library context due to the significant amount of highly-skilled volunteer labor that undergirds its functionality, there are ways in which we could consider subverting the Archive framework for use in traditional library catalogs. As the literature review of this study makes clear, there are extant systems that include some form of user-generated metadata alongside controlled records; several study participants mentioned searching by tag within their OPACs. The findings of this paper

indicate that we as librarians and information architects—despite our professional reticence towards abdicating control—should begin to think creatively about allowing lay users to define, link, and synonymize their own metadata. Could a future librarian serve as a tag moderator for his or her library system? Though the comprehensive control in place at AO3 might be a sort of platonic ideal of a moderated folksonomy, incremental change to permit or expand functionality of user-generated metadata systems would also likely bring improvements to subject access for LGBTQ+ users seeking fiction representative of their experiences.

The findings of this study also pointed to potential improvements for retrieval of LGBTQ+ objects that would require less restructuring of OPACs and extant information architectures. As mentioned in the discussion, it is likely that users are in part not attempting to use any kind of LGBTQ+ subject headings when searching because those sorts of headings are often not applied to fiction. Though some works featuring a gay character or queer themes will receive a helpful heading like "Homosexuality -- Fiction", others will not. For example, the 2015 young adult novel *Carry On: The Rise and Fall of Simon Snow* by Rainbow Rowell features two teenage boys who fall in love by the end of the book.[16] Of the 14 distinct subject headings assigned to the work in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill library catalog (as of this writing), none of them indicate that a same-sex relationship is a major plot point of the work. Instead, the user is shown that it contains themes related to "Dating (Social customs) -- Fiction", "Monsters -- Fiction", and "Roommates -- Juvenile fiction". In this case, the available summary also

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[16] *Carry On* is a particularly interesting case study because it is directly inspired by fan culture; the characters in this book were first seen as Harry Potter-esque fictional characters in the universe of *Fangirl*, another of Rowell's novels.

does not point to the LGBTQ+ content. With the prevalence of cooperative cataloging, it would be easy for a functionally incomplete record such as this one to proliferate.

A good first step to remedy this problem would be reliably including those headings that *do* exist when assigning subjects to a work: in this case the addition of something like "Bisexuality -- Fiction" would be an improvement. It would also, however, not be the most accurate descriptor for the work, which has characters that evade simple labels: creating new subject headings that capture the reality of 21st century understandings of gender, sexuality, and relationships *and* consistently employing those headings to describe works of fiction would be an ideal reality.[17] This would entail some structural change, including going through the onerous process of proposing new subject headings and encouraging catalogers to be vigilant in their use of them. The potential for improvement, however, is marked: respondents to this study indicated that they often search using AO3 tags that capture that a work features a queer relationship. Regular use of a subject heading as simple as "Queer relationship -- Fiction" (along with appropriate broader, narrower, and related terms) would begin to emulate the kind of access enjoyed by Archive users. This kind of heading would not be substantively different from the "Divorce -- Fiction" or even "Mother-daughter relationship -- Fiction" headings that currently exist. To cover different ground, the newly-approved "Gender nonconformity" heading could be formally subdivided into "Gender nonconformity -- Fiction".

While overall more helpful for users than its library equivalents, the findings of this paper also point to possible improvements for the AO3 tagging system. Though there

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[17] Many others have called for change in subject headings; see, for example, Roberto, 2011.

will be reliability inconsistencies as long as authors create their own metadata, it is highly possible that a system wherein users could suggest tags to be added to works would be of utility. Though readers can theoretically currently do this in the comments sections of works, a formalized structure wherein authors could simply approve or deny requests could lead to the availability of more descriptive metadata for all. In the event of author silence (or in the case of works that have been "orphaned" in the Archive; that is, disassociated from an author's account), a certain number of requests could trigger wrangler action. If 15 readers suggested adding "bisexual Ron Weasley" as a tag and the author takes does not respond, a wrangler might approve the petition for a new tag. This could also be useful for adding tags for elements some readers wish to avoid (in addition to the standard Archive Warnings). While this would be a substantial change for AO3 and require considerable volunteer developer labor, given AO3's commitment to tag usability it is certainly worth consideration.

This study contributes material to the lengthy list of considerations that system designers *must* keep in mind when thinking about improving user experience in search systems. These arguments for systemic modification could be buoyed by further research into additional alternative forms of fiction subject access for those populations typically poorly represented by LCSH. Though this study focused on metadata for LGBTQ+ material in a particular fannish context, there is certainly room for exploration of the usefulness of other alt-library metadata systems, like those in place at Goodreads or even at retail sites like Barnes and Noble. While Library of Congress Subject Headings are not entirely static, other necessarily more rapidly reactive (and, in some cases, clearly commercially viable) systems may use strategies from which librarians and information

scientists could learn a great deal.

Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Survey Flow

Block: Intro (3 Questions)
Standard: Block 1: Introductory text (1 Question)
Standard: Block 2 (6 Questions)
Standard: Block 3 (4 Questions)
Standard: Block 4 (6 Questions)
Standard: Block 5 (2 Questions)

BlockRandomizer: 1 - Evenly Present Elements

Standard: Block 6 (4 Questions)
Standard: Block 7 (11 Questions)

Standard: Block 8 (11 Questions)
Standard: Block 9 (9 Questions)
Standard: Block 10 (8 Questions)

EndSurvey:

Page Break

Start of Block: Intro

Q1 *Please confirm your eligibility for this survey.*

Are you over the age of 18?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q2 *Please confirm your eligibility for this survey.*

Do you use the online catalog of a public or academic library to find recreational reading material at least once every six months (on average)?

Note: This can be the catalog of a brick-and-mortar facility or a digital library.

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q3 *Please confirm your eligibility for this survey.*

Do you use the Archive of Our Own (or AO3) to find recreational reading material at least once every six months (on average)?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

End of Block: Intro

Start of Block: Block 1: Introductory text

Q4 Thank you for confirming your survey eligibility! The questions that follow will ask you about your reading habits and how you find reading material.

All questions relate to fictional recreational reading material: text you read for fun. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer.

Page Break

End of Block: Block 1: Introductory text

Start of Block: Block 2

Q5 In an average week, how much time do you spend reading **fiction of any kind** for pleasure?

○ 0 hours (1)

○ 0 to 2 hours (2)

○ 2 to 4 hours (3)

○ 4 to 6 hours (4)

○ 6 to 8 hours (5)

○ 8 to 10 hours (6)

○ more than 10 hours (7)

Q6 In an average week, how much time do you spend reading **fanfiction** for pleasure?

○ 0 hours (1)

○ 0 to 2 hours (2)

○ 2 to 4 hours (3)

○ 4 to 6 hours (4)

○ 6 to 8 hours (5)

○ 8 to 10 hours (6)

○ more than 10 hours (7)

Q7 In an average week, how much time do you spend reading non-fan created fiction (called from here on out "**traditional fiction**") for pleasure?

○ 0 hours (1)

○ 0 to 2 hours (2)

○ 2 to 4 hours (3)

○ 4 to 6 hours (4)

○ 6 to 8 hours (5)

○ 8 to 10 hours (6)

○ more than 10 hours (7)

Q8 How often does **all fiction** you read for pleasure feature LGBTQ+ characters?

○ **Never** (1)

○ **Rarely. Less than 25%** of the fiction I read includes LGBTQ+ characters. (2)

○ **Sometimes. Between 25% and 50%** of the fiction I read includes LGBTQ+ characters. (3)

○ **Often. Between 50% and 75%** of the fiction I read includes LGBTQ+ characters. (4)

○ **Very often. More than 75%** of the fiction I read includes LGBTQ+ characters. (5)

Q9 How often does the **fanfiction** you read for pleasure feature LGBTQ+ characters?

○ **Never** (1)

○ **Rarely. Less than 25%** of the fanfiction I read includes LGBTQ+ characters. (2)

○ **Sometimes. Between 25% and 50%** of the fanfiction I read includes LGBTQ+ characters. (3)

○ **Often. Between 50% and 75%** of the fanfiction I read includes LGBTQ+ characters. (4)

○ **Very often. More than 75%** of the fafiction I read includes LGBTQ+ characters. (5)

Q10 How often does the **traditional fiction** you read for pleasure feature LGBTQ+ characters?

○ **Never** (1)

○ **Rarely. Less than 25%** of the traditional fiction I read includes LGBTQ+ characters. (2)

○ **Sometimes. Between 25% and 50%** of the traditional fiction I read includes LGBTQ+ characters. (3)

○ **Often. Between 50% and 75%** of the traditional fiction I read includes LGBTQ+ characters. (4)

○ **Very often. More than 75%** of the traditional fiction I read includes LGBTQ+ characters. (5)

Page Break

End of Block: Block 2

Start of Block: Block 3

Q11 Overall, do you consider it important to you that **all fiction** you choose to read features LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and/or experiences?

○ **This is not at all important to me**. This is not a factor for me in choosing reading material (1)

○ **This is somewhat important to me.** I consider this when choosing reading material, but select fiction that does and does not include LGBTQ+ themes. (2)

○ **This is very important to me.** Most or all of the time, I try to select recreational reading material that features LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and experiences. (3)

Q12 Do you consider it important to you that **fanfiction** you choose to read features LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and/or experiences?

○ **This is not at all important to me.** This is not a factor for me in choosing fanfiction to read. (1)

○ **This is somewhat important to me.** I consider this when choosing reading material, but select fanfiction that does and does not include LGBTQ+ themes. (2)

○ **This is very important to me.** Most or all of the time, I try to select fanfiction that features LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and experiences. (3)

Q13 Do you consider it important to you that **traditional fiction** you choose to read features LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and/or experiences?

○ **This is not at all important to me.** This is not a factor for me in choosing traditional fiction. (1)

○ **This is somewhat important to me.** I consider this when choosing reading material, but select traditional fiction that does and does not include LGBTQ+ themes. (2)

○ **This is very important to me.** Most or all of the time, I try to select traditional fiction that features LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and experiences. (3)

Display This Question:

If Overall, do you consider it important to you that all fiction you choose to read features LGBTQ+... = This is very important to me. Most or all of the time, I try to select recreational reading material that features LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and experiences.

Or Do you consider it important to you that fanfiction you choose to read features LGBTQ+ characters... = This is very important to me. Most or all of the time, I try to select fanfiction that features LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and experiences.

Or Do you consider it important to you that traditional fiction you choose to read features LGBTQ+ c... = This is very important to me. Most or all of the time, I try to select traditional fiction that features LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and experiences.

Q14 Why is it very important to you to see LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and/or experiences featured?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Page Break

End of Block: Block 3

Start of Block: Block 4

Q15 How often do you search for **traditional fiction** on your preferred library website(s)?

○ At least once a day (1)

○ At least once a week (2)

○ At least once a month (3)

○ At least once every 2-3 months (4)

○ At least once every 6 months (5)

○ At least once a year (6)

○ Never (7)

Q16 How often do you search for **traditional fiction featuring LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and/or experiences** on your preferred library website(s)?

○ At least once a day (1)

○ At least once a week (2)

○ At least once a month (3)

○ At least once every 2-3 months (4)

○ At least once every 6 months (5)

○ At least once a year (6)

○ Never (7)

Q17 How often do you search for **fanfiction** on AO3?

○ At least once a day (1)

○ At least once a week (2)

○ At least once a month (3)

○ At least once every 2-3 months (4)

○ At least once every 6 months (5)

○ At least once a year (6)

○ Never (7)

Q18 How often do you search for **fanfiction featuring LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and/or experiences** on AO3?

○ At least once a day (1)

○ At least once a week (2)

○ At least once a month (3)

○ At least once every 2-3 months (4)

○ At least once every 6 months (5)

○ At least once a year (6)

○ Never (7)

Q19 What is your comfort level with **searching for traditional fiction** using your preferred public or academic library website?

○ **Not at all comfortable.** I do not feel comfortable using my local library website to search. (1)

○ **Somewhat comfortable.** I feel that I know how to use my local library website to search, but there may be aspects that I have not explored or I may have confusion about some features. (2)

○ **Very comfortable.** I feel that I am an expert or near-expert searcher of my local library website. (3)

Q20 What is your comfort level with searching for **fanfiction** using the Archive of Our Own?

○ **Not at all comfortable.** I do not feel comfortable using AO3 to search. (1)

○ **Somewhat comfortable.** I feel that I know how to use AO3 to search, but there may be aspects that I have not explored or I may have confusion about some features. (2)

○ **Very comfortable.** I feel that I am an expert or near-expert searcher of AO3. (3)

End of Block: Block 4

Start of Block: Block 5

Q21 When searching specifically for **works that feature LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and/or experiences**, what platform do you prefer to use?

○ My library's website or catalog (1)

○ AO3 (2)

○ I have no preference (3)

○ I do not like either option   (4)

Q22 Why is this your preferred platform?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Page Break

End of Block: Block 5

Start of Block: Block 6

Q23 In a few sentences, describe how you would go about browsing for a new piece of **traditional fiction** to read using your **library's online catalog**.
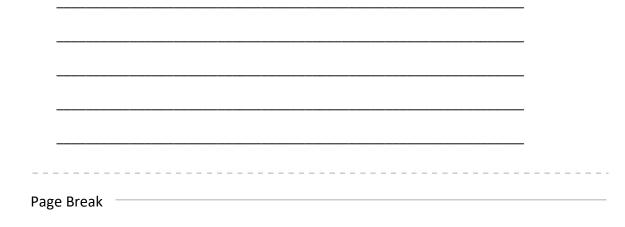 This description can be as detailed or as simple as you would like. Feel free to access the website while composing your response.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q24 In a few sentences, describe how you would go about browsing for a new work of **fanfiction** to read on **AO3**.

 This description can be as detailed or as simple as you would like. Feel free to access AO3 while composing your response.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Page Break

Q25 In a few sentences, describe how you would go about browsing for a new piece of **traditional fiction** to read featuring **LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and/or experiences** using your **library's online catalog**.   This description can be as detailed or as simple as you would like. Feel free to access the website while composing your response.   What do you **like** about searching for LGBTQ+ works on your library's website? What part of the search experience do you find most **frustrating**?

_____

_____

_____

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Q26 In a few sentences, describe how you would go about browsing for a new work of **fanfiction** to read featuring **LGBTQ+ characters, themes, and/or experiences** on **AO3**.   This description can be as detailed or as simple as you would like. Feel free to access the website while composing your response.   What do you **like** about searching for LGBTQ+ works on AO3? What part of the AO3 search experience do you find most **frustrating**?

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Page Break

End of Block: Block 6

Start of Block: Block 7

Q27 Please open a new browser window or tab and navigate to the search page for the catalog of your preferred local library. Take no more than 7 minutes (approximately) to try to pull up a list of books featuring a bisexual character.

Q28 Did you succeed at this task?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I'm not sure (3)

Display This Question:

If Did you succeed at this task? = Yes

Q29 Approximately how long did this task take you?

○ Less than one minute (1)
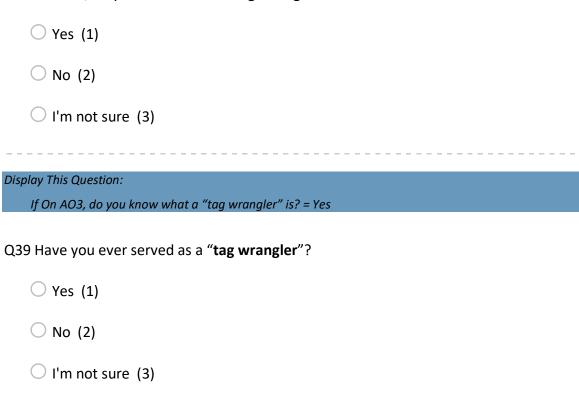
○ 1 to 2 minutes (2)

○ 2 to 5 minutes (3)

○ More than 5 minutes   (4)

Q30 In your own words, **how did you go about obtaining this list of books featuring a bisexual character**? Or, if you were not successful, what did you try? Don't worry about being too specific; a general sense of the steps you took is fine.

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Q31 Did you find this task difficult? Why or why not?

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Q32 What kind of library did you search?

○ An academic library (1)

○ A public library (2)

○ Other (3)

○ I'm not sure (4)

Page Break

Q33 Now you will be asked to find a list of fanfiction works that feature a bisexual character. Please open a new browser window or tab and navigate to the AO3 search page (http://archiveofourown.org/works/search). Take no more than 7 minutes (approximately) to try to pull up a list of books featuring a bisexual character.

Q34 Did you succeed at this task?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I'm not sure (3)

Q35 Approximately how long did this task take you?

○ Less than one minute (1)

○ 1 to 2 minutes (2)

○ 2 to 5 minutes (3)

○ More than 5 minutes   (4)

Q36 In your own words, **how did you go about obtaining this list of works featuring a bisexual character**? Or, if you were not successful, what did you try? Don't worry about being too specific; a general sense of the steps you took is fine.

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Q37 Did you find this task difficult? Why or why not?

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Page Break

End of Block: Block 7

Start of Block: Block 8

Q38 On AO3, do you know what a "**tag wrangler**" is?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I'm not sure (3)

Display This Question:

If On AO3, do you know what a "tag wrangler" is? = Yes

Q39 Have you ever served as a "**tag wrangler**"?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I'm not sure (3)

Q40 Do you feel that you have knowledge of the **AO3 tagging system** as detailed in the Wrangling Guidelines (http://archiveofourown.org/wrangling_guidelines)?

○ **Yes, a great amount.** I know the ins and outs of the AO3 tagging system. (1)

○ **Yes, somewhat.** I know a little about the system, but would not consider myself an expert. (2)

○ **Yes, I've heard of it.** I know there is a system, but that is close to the extent of my knowledge. (3)

○ **No, not at all.** I did not know there was a special system for tagging until right now. (4)

Q41 Do you use **tags** when searching for new recreational reading material on **AO3**?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I'm not sure (3)

Q42 How often do you use **tags**? An estimate is fine.   *Think about a "search" as one session of trying to find material to read, no matter how many times you clicked a search button in that session. For example, if you spent 15 minutes trying to find a text with a bisexual character and then either gave up or found what you needed, that would be one search.*

○ **Never.** (1)

○ **Rarely.** I use tags in less than 25% of my searches. (2)

○ **Sometimes.** I use tags in between 25% and 50% of my searches. (3)

○ **Often.** I use tags in between 50% and 75% of my searches. (4)

○ **Very often.** I use tags in more than 75% of my searches. (5)

Q43 Do you use **tags related to gender or sexual identity** to find new recreational reading material in **AO3**?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I'm not sure (3)

Q44 How often do you use **tags related to gender or sexual identity**? An estimate is fine.   *Think about a "search" as one session of trying to find material to read, no matter how many times you clicked a search button in that session. For example, if you spent 15 minutes trying to find a book with a bisexual character and then either gave up or found what you needed, that would be one search.*

○ **Never.** (1)

○ **Rarely.** I use these tags in less than 25% of my searches. (2)

○ **Sometimes.** I use these tags in between 25% and 50% of my searches. (3)

○ **Often.** I use these tags in between 50% and 75% of my searches. (4)

○ **Very often.** I use these tags in more than 75% of my searches. (5)

Q45 Have you ever published anything on **AO3**?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I'm not sure (3)

Q46 Did you tag your publication?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I'm not sure (3)

Q47 Do you use **AO3 tags** for any purpose **besides searching** for material?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I'm not sure (3)

Q48 For what purpose besides searching do you use AO3 tags?

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Page Break

End of Block: Block 8

Start of Block: Block 9

Q49 Do you know what a **subject heading** is?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I'm not sure (3)

Q50 Imagine you are looking at the entry for a book in a library catalog. Do you know where to find that book's **subject headings**?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I'm not sure (3)

Display This Question:

    If Imagine you are looking at the entry for a book in a library catalog. Do you know where to find t... = Yes

Q51 Do you have any **specialized knowledge** of subject headings?   *Types of people who might answer yes to this question include librarians and professional researchers; use your own judgment to answer.*

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q52 Do you ever use **subject headings** while searching for new recreational reading material?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I'm not sure (3)

Q53 How often do you use **subject headings when searching**? An estimate is fine.   *Think about a "search" as one session of trying to find material to read, no matter how many times you clicked a search button in that session. For example, if you spent 15 minutes trying to find a book with a bisexual character and then either gave up or found what you needed, that would be one search.*

○ **Never.** (1)

○ **Rarely.** I use subject headings in less than 25% of my searches. (2)

○ **Sometimes.** I use subject headings in between 25% and 50% of my searches. (3)

○ **Often.** I use subject headings in between 50% and 75% of my searches. (4)

○ **Very often.** I use subject headings in more than 75% of my searches. (5)

Q54 Do you use **subject headings** related to **gender or sexual identity** to find new recreational reading material?   *An example of this kind of subject heading would be Asexuality (Sexual orientation) -- Fiction.*

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I'm not sure (3)

Display This Question:

   If Do you use subject headings related to gender or sexual identity to find new recreational reading...
= Yes

Q55 How often do you use **subject headings** related to **gender or sexual identity when searching**? An estimate is fine.   *Think about a "search" as one session of trying to find material to read, no matter how many times you clicked a search button in that session. For example, if you spent 15 minutes trying to find a book with a bisexual character and then either gave up or found what you needed, that would be one search.*

○ **Never.** (1)

○ **Rarely.** I use these subject headings in less than 25% of my searches. (2)

○ **Sometimes.** I use these subject headings in between 25% and 50% of my searches. (3)

○ **Often.** I use these subject headings in between 50% and 75% of my searches. (4)

○ **Very often.** I use these subject headings in more than 75% of my searches. (5)

Q56 Do you use **subject headings** for any purpose **besides searching** for material?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I'm not sure (3)

Q57 What else do you use subject headings for?

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Page Break

End of Block: Block 9

Start of Block: Block 10

Q58 Thank you for your time spent taking this survey so far! To complete the survey, please answer a few questions about your identity and fan activity.

Page Break

Q59 How old are you?

○ 18 to 24 (1)

○ 25 to 34 (2)

○ 35 to 44 (3)

○ 45 to 54 (4)

○ 55 to 64 (5)

○ 65 or older (6)

Q60 How would you describe your gender identity?   *Answers to this question are helpful for research purposes, but it is optional.*

_____

Q61 How would you describe your sexual identity?   *Answers to this question are helpful for research purposes, but it is optional.*

_____

Q62 What language do you use most frequently to communicate? This may be your native language, but it may not be.
 Answers to this question are helpful for research purposes, but it is optional.

_____

Q63 Of what fan community or communities, if any, do you have particular knowledge?

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Q64 Have you ever written fanfiction?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I'm not sure (3)

Q65 Do you have an AO3 account?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I'm not sure (3)

End of Block: Block 10

Appendix B: Tumblr Recruitment Post

March 3, 2018 update: Thank you for your interest in this project. The survey is now closed. Updates on this research will be provided on this blog later this spring!

Are you an LGBTQ+ adult who likes reading both traditional fiction and fan-created work? Are you interested in participating in research about how we find recreational materials?

I'm an information science graduate student at UNC Chapel Hill and longtime fan conducting master's research on how people find LGBTQ+ themed recreational reading material using AO3 tags and library subject headings. I'm looking for people **18 and over** who regularly use both library catalogs and AO3 (all fandoms) to fill out a survey about their searching behavior. **Please use the link below to contact me, find out more information, or take my (completely anonymous) survey.** I'm hoping that the knowledge gleaned from this study could contribute to eventual improvement of that systems we use to find queer reading material.

Not interested? Don't qualify? Please feel free to tell a friend or reblog this post. I'd love participants from all fan communities.

Thanks!

Survey link: http://bit.ly/2EzzNFR

#tagging this in hopes many fandoms find it   #research   #fandom #fanfiction   #acafan   #fan studies   #fanstudies   #library science #information science   #information retrieval   #searching   #survey   #study #yuri on ice   #Stephen King   #harry potter   #overwatch   #hamilton   #jimi #BTS   #gorillaz   #harry styles   #jacksepticeye   #the adventure zone #roman reigns   #ali krieger   #kylie jenner   #kendall jenner   #tom holland #katie mcgrath

329 notes

Appendix C: Twitter Recruitment Post

Appendix D: Advanced Search Via Work Tags Screenshot

Appendix E: Sort and Filter Functionalities Screenshot

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