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This study reports on a content analysis conducted on AUTOCAT, an electronic mailing list dedicated to cataloging. The study was conducted to determine the trends and patterns that exist among the discussions occurring on AUTOCAT. This was done by analyzing the email messages posted on AUTOCAT according to topic, function, job title of message author, and institutional affiliation of message author. A systematic random sample of 567 messages was chosen from an estimated total of 10,300 messages posted to AUTOCAT during 2007. The findings of the study indicate that AUTOCAT is being used by cataloging professionals as a valuable resource for solving immediate cataloging questions, especially for message posters who are affiliated with academic libraries that are not members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). Also, the study suggests that message posters who are affiliated with ARL libraries tend to use AUTOCAT as a discussion forum for general cataloging standards and policies. Other cataloging topics that appear to be heavily discussed on AUTOCAT are professional concerns and technology issues.

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THE PROFESSIONAL DISCUSSIONS OF CATALOGERS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS
OF AUTOCAT

by
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1 Introduction

In order to understand the domain of cataloging, it is important to know what cataloging issues professionals deal with in their daily work lives. Cataloging is a dynamic, challenging activity and requires catalogers to adapt to frequent changes in cataloging practice. Cataloging is a dynamic activity because it reflects changes that occur in the rest of the world. For example, new subject terms must be added to describe new technologies or momentous events. Additionally, the basic methods and procedures of cataloging are modified as technology and information evolve. A major change in the cataloging practice is forecasted to occur in 2009, with the potential release of Resource Description and Access (RDA), a standard that will replace the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, Second Edition (AACR2). RDA is based on Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR), which is a conceptual model that considers relationships among entities as works, expressions, manifestations, or items (Tillett, 2004). RDA is meant to improve access and discovery in the digital environment and change cataloging methods that were created with rigid limitations for the sake of printed card catalogs.

The field of cataloging is challenging in part because of the large number of information tools that catalogers often need to use during the course of their daily work. Catalogers routinely search their own integrated library system as well as Connexion, software to manipulate bibliographic and authority records in the Online Computer

Library Center (OCLC) Online Union Catalog, to find and share records, and to look at how new cataloging records will fit in with existing records. Additionally, catalogers may need to search AACR2 to verify a rule, browse the Subject Cataloging Manual for guidance, or look into Classification Web, a web based aid for assigning call numbers. Another resource that catalogers may use frequently is AUTOCAT, a specialized electronic mailing list for catalogers.

AUTOCAT serves as a forum for the discussion of cataloging topics among practicing catalogers, who all strive to work together through cooperative cataloging. “AUTOCAT is a semi-moderated international electronic discussion list, and it serves as an electronic forum for the discussion of all questions relating to cataloging, authority control, and often larger technical services issues, in libraries. The range of topics discussed extends from the very broad to the very specific, from the very theoretical to the most pragmatic” (*Scope and Purpose of AUTOCAT*, 2007). One of the AUTOCAT list owners, Hopkins (2002) expressed the role of AUTOCAT as a community of catalogers, but emphasized that “its greatest role is in the area of informal continuing education” (p. 375). Condrón and Tittmore (2001) identified AUTOCAT as the standard among discussion lists for the cataloging profession. AUTOCAT is a place where catalogers can report errors in OCLC records that they wish to have corrected, discuss their options for cataloging materials that do not clearly follow established standards, find or post job advertisements, and discuss current cataloging issues.

2 Literature Review

The present study has been placed into the context of existing literature through the examination of three main themes. The first theme explores the value of how professional discussion lists have been analyzed in previous research. The results of research performed using content analysis specifically within the field of cataloging constitute the second theme, which acted as a guide for the methodology of the content analysis in the present research study. The third theme discusses how AUTOCAT has been addressed prior to the present study in professional library literature and research.

Professional Discussion Lists

Bar-Ilan and Assouline (1997) performed content analysis on Public Libraries, Young Adults, and Children (PUBYAC), a discussion list created for public librarians who work in Children's and Young Adult Services. Three hundred and nine messages that were sent to PUBYAC between May 20, 1997 and June 20, 1997 were analyzed. The messages were sorted into six types: reference, library administration and policy, collection management, extension programs, announcements and PUBYAC matters, and other. The greatest percentage of messages fell into the reference type, providing evidence that PUBYAC took on the role of an information source for its subscribers. Bar-Ilan and Assouline also sent a message to PUBYAC in an attempt to ascertain the information resources that were used by the librarians before belonging to PUBYAC. The librarians' responses showed that they had previously used both print sources and

colleagues for their informational needs. However, the communication methods used prior to the discussion list, such as phone calls or meetings, often took considerably more time than simply using the list.

In the study of Bar-Ilan and Assouline, reliability was suggested because another person coded 31 messages (10% of the total messages), and reached the same conclusions as Bar-Ilan and Assouline for 29 of them. The decision of Bar-Ilan and Assouline to send a message to PUBYAC potentially introduced an intrusive element into what otherwise would have been an unobtrusive study, if it was sent before June 20, 1997. The date that the message was sent to the list was not provided in the article, so it is not known whether the study was unobtrusive or not. The study by Bar-Ilan and Assouline was one of several studies done on a library discussion list that showed the value of the list as an informational resource.

Wildemuth, Crenshaw, Jenniches, and Harmes (1997) completed a study of 14 different library discussions lists using content analysis. In the study, which was done in 1994, 21 students used content analysis to identify message topics and functions on the 14 various lists. Each student chose one list to analyze for a time period of around one month; in some cases, more than one student chose to analyze the same list.

Approximately 150 messages were analyzed by each student. The messages were selected randomly if more than 150 messages were available for a list during its analyzed time period. There were a total of 171 topics assigned to the messages by the students, and there were no topics that covered more than six percent of all of the list topics combined. There were 18 functions that were assigned to the messages. The function that had the highest percentage across all lists combined was “general response.”

The findings of the study by Wildemuth et al. (1997) indicated that message topics usually corresponded with the purposes of the lists as described by the owners of the lists. The relatively high percentage of “general responses” suggested that the lists were used for discussion. A strength of the study was that the students did not send any messages to their lists during the time of analysis, which resulted in an unobtrusive study. A weakness of the study was that its reliability could not be measured because some of the lists were coded by only one student.

Edwards (1999) analyzed the PUBYAC discussion list using content analysis in a Master's paper. The study concentrated on messages posted for one month beginning on August 7, 1999. Rather than use the types identified by Bar-Ilan and Assouline, new coding categories were developed. Latent coding was used rather than manifest coding in order to allow the meaning of the text to serve as a basis for the generation of categories. The messages were coded using six different categories: programs, finding books, collection, library administration and policy, professional issues, and announcements. The categories were then divided further into sub-categories. The function of each message was coded as an inquiry, response, or announcement/general comment. Edwards found that the majority of messages were about programs, which may have been a seasonal topic due to the timing of the study falling at the start of a new school year.

Edwards (1999) gave a clear portrayal of the ways that the subscribers used PUBYAC as a resource and as a community. She identified the tone of messages as generally thankful and complimentary about the list and the people on it. When there was a disagreement between subscribers, they maintained respect for one another. The results from Edwards' study were compared to the findings of Bar-Ilan and Assouline as

well as to the study by Wildemuth et al. One of the major findings was that there were 530 messages during one month in 1999 compared to 309 messages in one month in 1997. In 1994, there were only 155 messages in the time frame of one month. The large number of messages in 1999 suggested that the list had increased in popularity compared to earlier years.

Christie and Azzam (2004) performed content analysis on EVALTALK, a listserv for evaluation professionals, for messages posted between April 2002 and April 2003. Evaluation professionals assess the strengths and weaknesses of programs, policies, personnel, products, and organizations to improve their effectiveness” (*American Evaluation Association*, 2007). The purpose of EVALTALK is to provide a forum for information exchange about best practices in the field of evaluation. The findings indicated that substantial discussions often supported the purpose of the listserv, but that many messages were not directly about evaluation best practices. “Much of the EVALTALK activity centered on requests for evaluation examples, procedures, and experiences” (Christie, Azzam, 2004, p. 230). The participants of the list were found to be primarily evaluation professionals, students, and faculty. The content findings suggested that EVALTALK supported a wider variety of topics than the topic of the intended purpose, and that it acted as informational tool and community for its subscribers.

Schoch and Shooshan (1997) analyzed a discussion list for the Medical Library Association called MEDLIB-L by using a questionnaire. The purpose of the study was to find out who participated in the list, how they were participating, and the effects of the participation on the participants, their institutions, and the other list participants. The

questionnaire was sent out to 355 randomly selected members of the list, which at the time had over 2,000 subscribers, and 128 returned questionnaires were analyzed. The largest percentage of the subjects were employed at academic institutions. Eighty-three point one percent identified themselves as professionals, and “nearly 90% of respondents indicated that they read MEDLIB-L at work” (Schoch, Shooshan, 1997, p. 29). It is worthwhile to note that this study about who uses the discussion list is related to the present research study because it is possible to collect similar information about AUTOCAT posters through the means of content analysis; subscribers who post to AUTOCAT traditionally identify themselves and their institutional affiliations at the bottom of their messages. The findings of the study by Schoch and Shooshan (1997) indicate that “the most frequently performed activities were asking and answering reference questions and discussing products and procedures” (p.29).

A strength of the study by Schoch and Shooshan was the pilot test of the questionnaire. In the pilot test, it was discovered that some members of MEDLIB-L had not known that they were still subscribed to it. Therefore, the first question on the questionnaire asked the subjects if they had membership to MEDLIB-L. A weakness of the study was that subjects were asked if they had asked questions, answered questions, initiated discussion, or replied to discussion in a question. No definition was provided for what would be questions and what would be discussion, despite the potential for overlap between the two when a question might lead to a discussion. For instance, Bar-Ilan and Assouline (1997) operationalized the definition of discussion as “three or more messages on a specific topic” in their study, but a clear definition is not given in the study by Schoch and Shooshan.

A common theme indicated by the studies was that a small percentage of subscribers contributed the majority of the messages to the lists. The studies also suggested the existence of lurkers on the lists. Lurkers were subscribers who did not post messages, which indicates a weakness in the methodology of content analysis of discussion lists. Studying lurkers would be an advantage of a questionnaire, as Schoch and Shooshan found that “most respondents engaged in discussions and posted information infrequently or never” (1997, p.29).

Content Analysis of Cataloging Topics

Two content analysis studies were completed in recent years in the domain of cataloging that have relevance for the present research study. They inform the idea that a content analysis study is a viable method of bringing out important topics in the profession of cataloging. The literature review also shows that there is a gap in the literature where content analysis has not been conducted on the discussions of electronic mailing lists specialized for the cataloging profession.

Olson (2006) used a content analysis to identify cataloging topics as they appeared in *Library Quarterly* between 1931 and 2004. In the study, cataloging is called organization of information, and it is defined as “bibliographic control, its theoretical underpinnings, and the standards and practices used to achieve it” (Olson, 2006, p. 20). One hundred and eighty-four articles were identified as having cataloging themes from 74 volumes of *Library Quarterly*. Forty-four point five percent of the articles were published between 1931 and 1935, while 38% were published between 1956 and 1980. Only 17.5% of the articles were published between 1981 and 2004. The decreasing percentages over time suggested that the importance of cataloging as a core library

subject was stronger in earlier years than it is now. The content analysis of the articles led to the identification of six main themes: classification, cataloging codes, subject access, the form of catalogs, cost and related management issues, and reports from other countries. Some subjects that were not represented include indexing, authority control, and the role of catalogers.

Roe, Culbertson, and Jizba (2007) did a study that was similar to Olson's regarding cataloging articles and topics in the journal of *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly*. The content analysis showed that the rate of contribution from countries other than the United States has been increasing throughout the years. For instance, for volumes 1 through 10 of the journal, there were contributors from only 10 countries other than the United States of America and Great Britain. For volumes 21 through 30, there were 19 authors from other countries. For the most recent volumes of 31 through 41, there were 31 authors from countries besides the United States of America and Great Britain. The results of this study suggested that *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* is growing to be more international in scope.

In 42 quarterly volumes, 38 issues, which were either a single issue or a double issue, were found to be devoted to a particular theme by Roe, Culbertson, and Jizba (2007). One of the recent themes was Authority Control in Organizing and Accessing Information: Definition and International Experience. This contrasted with Olson's content analysis of *Library Quarterly* where authority was not found as a topic. The myriad of topics discussed in *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* contrasted with the diminishing number of cataloging topics in *Library Quarterly* indicated that cataloging is becoming more specialized and less of a core subject in librarianship. This

suggested that to adequately study the full range of topics in the field of cataloging through a content analysis, a specialized informational resource for the field of cataloging is desired.

AUTOCAT

Nelson and Marner (1995) wrote an article summarizing a discussion that took place on AUTOCAT regarding dates in added entries. A Library of Congress (LC) rule said that dates must be routinely added to the end of analytic added entries. A question to the list regarding the rule initiated a lively discussion that attracted the interest of an LC employee, ultimately resulting in a proposed LC policy change to drop dates in analytic added entries. Fourteen people were involved in the discussion, and they were identified by name, position title, and institutional affiliation in the article. This article indicates that discussions on AUTOCAT have had an influence in decision-making for the cataloging profession.

Leysen and Pelzer (1996) wrote an article about the idea of telecataloging, or cataloging from home, based in part on summarizing messages that were posted to AUTOCAT. Several concerns about telecataloging were raised by the subscribers of AUTOCAT. Distractions, isolation, adequate computer equipment, and adequate physical space were areas that were identified as having the potential to be problematic. Other catalogers who successfully did telecataloging shared their experiences with the AUTOCAT discussion list, which were presented in the article as cataloging activities that were suitable for work at home, such as authority correction work and database cleanup.

AUTOCAT has been a data source of a previous study that was published in *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly*. The study performed a content analysis on job advertisements for catalogers in order to identify key job requirements for cataloging managers and supervisors. AUTOCAT served as a data source of job announcements for the conduction of content analysis. As AUTOCAT was one of three sources for analysis of job advertisements, it is implied that AUTOCAT is considered a key source for finding job announcements in the field of cataloging. The article was written in 2006 by Dr. Hall-Ellis, Library and Information Science professor at the University of Denver, and it was entitled “Descriptive Impressions of Managerial and Supervisory Cataloger Positions as Reflected in American Libraries, AutoCAT, and the Colorado State Library Jobline, 2000-2004: A Content Analysis of Education, Competencies, and Experience.”

In the first theme, the value of content analysis as it pertains to professional electronic mailing lists was discussed. A problem of content analysis as a method was identified, which was that a content analysis of posted messages does not capture information about subscribers who are lurkers on a list. However, content analysis did allow for in-depth examination of the topics that are discussed by the mailing list community. Researchers usually coded for the topic and function of each message and then counted the frequencies of each. User identification information, message tone, and relevance of prevalent topics to an electronic mailing list's stated purpose were also examined through content analysis. In the second theme, the results of content analysis conducted on cataloging topics in library journals and how the topics have changed over time were discussed. The trend seemed to be that cataloging has become a more specialized field rather than a core library topic; also, it seemed to have become more

international in scope. The third theme showed that AUTOCAT has a place in library literature and research, but that there is gap in that an empirical research study has not been done on AUTOCAT's discussion content. In order to learn more about the discussions that professional catalogers have in their daily work lives, the present study attempts to build on the previous studies regarding professional mailing lists and content analysis of cataloging topics through a content analysis of AUTOCAT.

3 Research Goals

The overarching research question guiding this paper is: What are the major cataloging topics discussed in the daily work life of professional catalogers as portrayed on AUTOCAT?

Specific questions are as follows:

- How frequently is each cataloging topic discussed?
- What are the major functions of messages posted to AUTOCAT?
- How frequent is the occurrence of each message function in messages posted to AUTOCAT?
- What types of jobs are represented by AUTOCAT posters?
- What is the proportion of posters in each job type?
- What types of institutional affiliations are represented by AUTOCAT posters?
- What is the proportion of posters for each type of institutional affiliation?

4 Methodology

Study Design

A content analysis was chosen to investigate the research questions posted above because it has allowed for the appropriate data to be gathered. An additional benefit of the content analysis approach is that it allows for an unobtrusive study of the topic at hand, the discussion topics of practicing catalogers. The communication of catalogers has been studied as it has naturally occurred; there was no controlled manipulation of independent variables as in an experiment.

The establishment of the codebook was done through pilot testing prior to the coding of the messages that served as the sample for the present study. Latent coding, which is based on the meaning of the text, was used in the present study. Latent coding was chosen because it traditionally has greater validity than manifest coding, or the tallies of the number of times that specific words appear in the text. An attempt was made to choose coding categories that are both exhaustive and mutually exclusive (Neuendorf, 2002). The topics that were identified in previous content analysis studies that were discussed in the literature review served as a basis for developing the categories in the codebook of the present study.

Definition of Variables

Both content and form variables have been measured in the present study using the codebook shown in the Appendix. The content variables are topic, job title, and

institutional affiliation, while message function is a form variable because it is particular to the nature of a discussion list. Messages have been coded for only one level for each variable. The definitions are as follows:

- Message topic – subject of message as intended by the message poster
- Message function – purpose of the message as intended by the message poster
- Job title – job type as indicated by the words used to describe the job title, primarily found in the signature of the message poster
- Institutional affiliation – type of institution as indicated by the words used to describe institutional affiliation, primarily found in the signature of the message poster

The message topic has been coded only from the body text of the posted message when feasible. If more context has been necessary to code the message topic, then earlier messages in thread have been considered in the coding process. Forwarded emails have been counted as one message from the person responsible for forwarding the email.

Emails that have been compiled responses have been treated as one email from the person responsible for compiling the email. Email attachments have been disregarded.

Signatures have been noted for the purposes of collecting job title and institutional affiliation; other signature information has been disregarded. Research has been done to find out the type of institutional affiliation based on a given institution name in the message, but in the event that research failed to indicate the type of institution, it has been coded as unknown.

Systematic Random Sampling

The sampling frame for the present research study was the archives of the AUTOCAT for the year of 2007. These archives were freely available online at the time

of the study. Systematic random sampling has been used to determine the messages that have been included in the present research study. The findings of the study better represent the sampling frame because probability sampling was used rather than non-probability sampling.

There were approximately 10,300 messages posted to AUTOCAT in 2007. This was calculated by counting messages for the first weeks of January, April, July, and October and multiplying by 52/4 to find the approximate total for the year. The present study has a desired sample size of 567 in order to have a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 4 (*Sample Size Calculator*, 2007). This means that if the study were to be repeated 100 times, it is expected that 95 times the findings would be representative of the sampling frame, plus or minus four percent. For example, if a topic was found to have a frequency of 30% in the findings, then it would be expected that the same topic would have a frequency of 26-34% among all of the messages in the year of 2007 for 95% of the time.

With a sample size of 567, the kth value was calculated as 18 (Neuendorf, 2002). The archives of AUTOCAT show each posted message as a discrete unit, whether a message stands alone or is a reply to a previous message. Every 18th message has been analyzed in the present research study, starting with the message number of a randomly generated number and following the order of messages as presented in the AUTOCAT archives. The AUTOCAT archives groups messages by week, and then groups messages by subject within each week. Periodicity was not found in the pilot testing; nor was it found in the sampling frame of the year of messages posted to AUTOCAT in 2007. If

periodicity had been found in the pilot testing or sampling frame, then a different probability sampling method would have been used.

Intercoder Reliability

After the codebook was established, 10% of the messages were coded by two coders and intercoder reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa. Calculating Cohen's kappa is a stronger measure of intercoder reliability than simply measuring percent agreement between two coders. Determining Cohen's kappa is more rigorous than measuring percent agreement because it is calculated in a way that accounts for the likelihood that agreement between coders was due to chance. Table 1 shows the value of Cohen's kappa for each variable in the codebook used in the present study.

Table 1: Cohen's Kappa Calculated for Each Variable

	Message Topic	Message Function	Job Title	Institutional Affiliation
Cohen's kappa	83%	96%	95%	91%

As Cohen's kappa is greater than 70% for all four of the variables in the codebook, it shows that the codebook is a reliable analytical tool, producing consistent agreement between independent coders that is not simply due to chance.

5 Analysis and Results

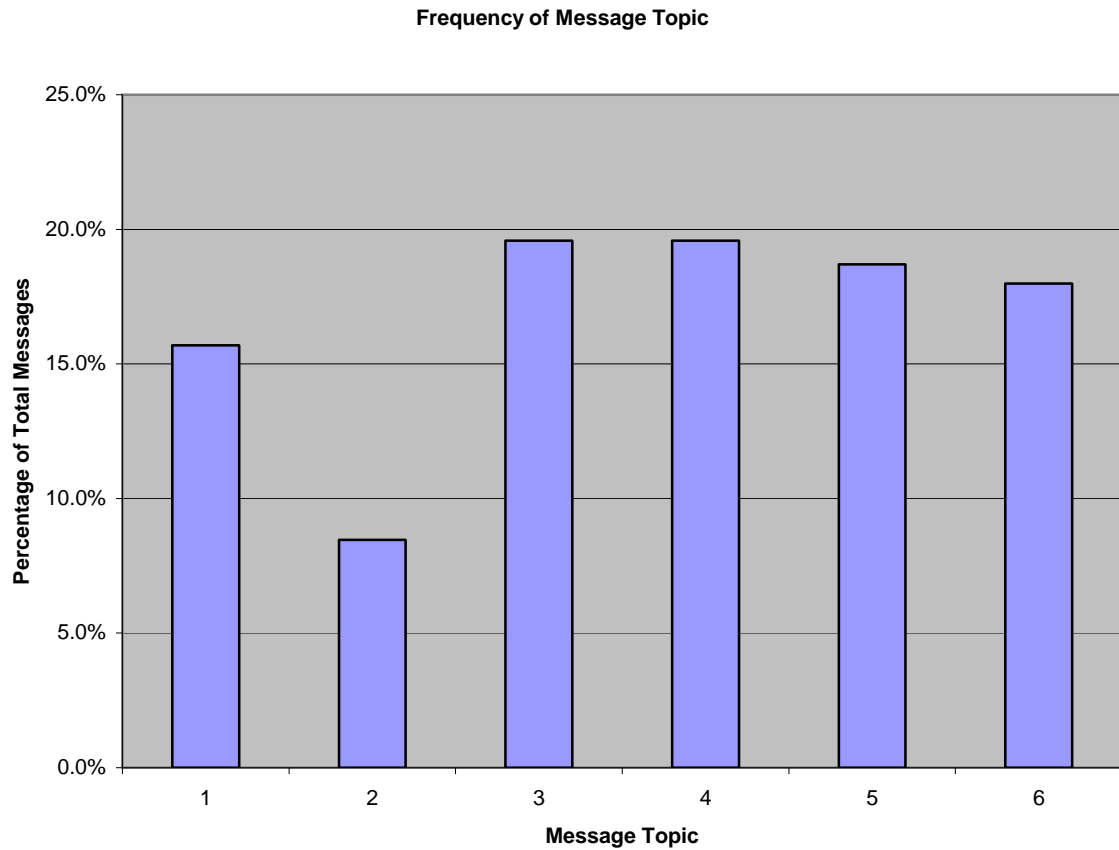
Descriptive analysis of the data has been carried out to show the total number of messages that fall into each category for each variable. Specifically, the number of messages for each category in each variable have been summed and calculated as a percentage of the whole.

Table 2 and Figure 1 show that messages are broken down fairly evenly into each topic. The message topics of “general cataloging standards, models, policies” and “professional issues” are the major cataloging topics that were discussed on AUTOCAT during the year of 2007. The two topics tie for the highest percentage of postings, each with 19.6%, while the message topic of “non-monographic item-specific cataloging issues” has the least percentage of postings with 8.5%.

Table 2: Total Number and Percent of Messages for Each Topic

Message Topic	Monographic Item-Specific Cataloging Issues	Non-monographic Item-Specific Cataloging Issues	General Cataloging Standards, Models, Policies	Professional Issues	Technology Issues	Other
Count	89	48	111	111	106	102
Percentage	15.7%	8.5%	19.6%	19.6%	18.7%	18.0%

Figure 1:



Message Topic:

1. Monographic Item-Specific Cataloging Issues
2. Non-Monographic Item-Specific Cataloging Issues
3. General Cataloging Standards, Models, Policies
4. Professional Issues
5. Technology Issues
6. Other

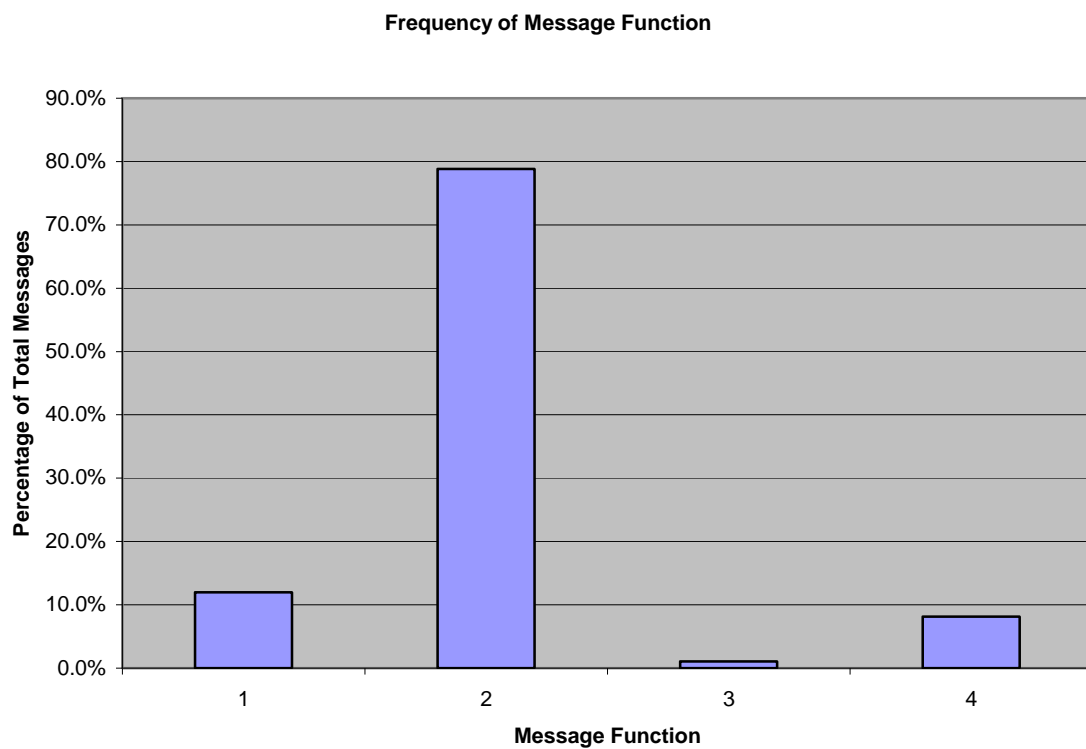
The frequencies of the messages functions vary greatly from one function to another as shown below in Table 3 and Figure 2. Close to 80% of posts to AUTOCAT

for 2007 are an “answer or reply.” While “answer or reply” is a major message function, “question or initiation of discussion” accounts for 12% of messages posted, and “announcement” makes up around 8% of posts. There are few messages with the function of “report error in OCLC record” as they account for about 1% of posts.

Table 3: Total Number and Percent of Messages for Each Function

Message Function	Question or Initiation of Discussion	Answer or Reply	Report Error in OCLC Record	Announcement
Count	68	447	6	46
Percentage	12.0%	78.8%	1.1%	8.1%

Figure 2:



Message Function:

1. Question or Initiation of Discussion

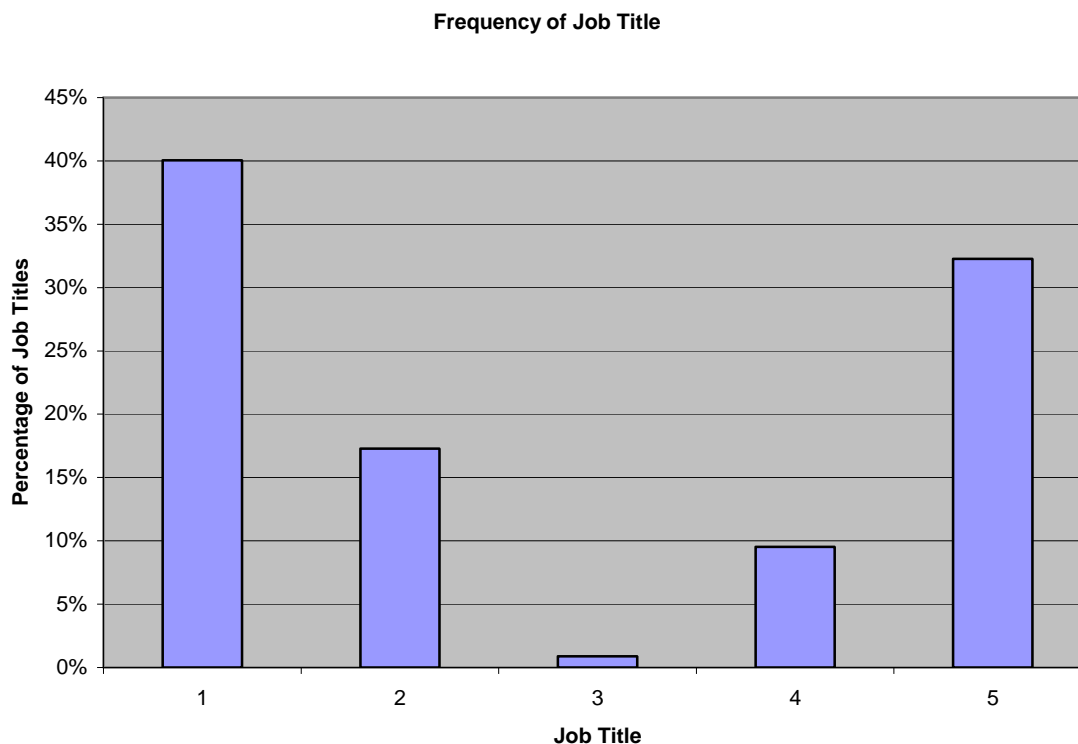
2. Answer or Reply
3. Report Error in OCLC Record
4. Announcement

Table 4 and Figure 3 show that the largest group of posters to AUTOCAT identified themselves as a “cataloging librarian or metadata librarian” as they make up 40% of job titles. The next largest group is “unknown” with 32.3%, followed by “other librarian” at 17.3%. Only around 10% of messages are “other,” and 0.9% of posts are from a “library graduate student or recent graduate.”

Table 4: Total Number and Percent of Messages for Each Job Title

Job Title	Cataloging Librarian or Metadata Librarian	Other Librarian	Library Graduate Student or Recent Graduate	Other	Unknown
Count	227	98	5	54	183
Percentage	40.0%	17.3%	0.9%	9.5%	32.3%

Figure 3:



Job Title:

1. Cataloging Librarian or Metadata Librarian
2. Other Librarian
3. Library Graduate Student or Recent Graduate
4. Other
5. Unknown

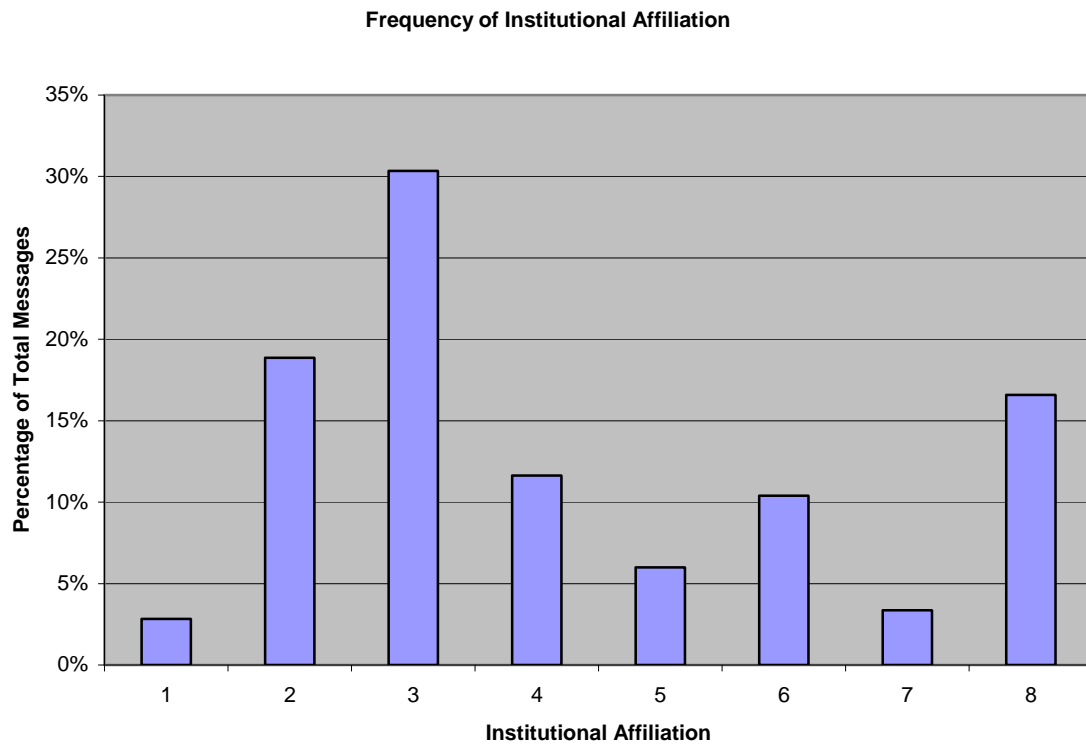
Table 5 and Figure 4 show the results from coding the type of institutional affiliation of the posters to AUTOCAT. The major type of poster affiliation is “non-ARL (Association of Research Libraries) academic library” with around 30% of posts. “ARL member” and “unknown” are the next most frequent types, accounting for around 19% and 17% of posts, respectively. While “non-ARL public library” accounts for almost

12%, “company” makes up a little over 10% of types. “Other library” is the poster affiliation for 6%, and “other” is 3.4%. “Library of Congress” is affiliated with the least number of posts at less than 3%.

Table 5: Total Number and Percent of Messages for Each Institutional Affiliation

Institutional Affiliation	Library of Congress	ARL Member	Non-ARL Academic Library	Non-ARL Public Library	Other Library	Company	Other	Unknown
Count	16	107	172	66	34	59	19	94
Percentage	2.8%	18.9%	30.3%	11.6%	6.0%	10.4%	3.4%	16.6%

Figure 4:



Institutional Affiliation:

1. Library of Congress
2. ARL Member
3. Non-ARL Academic Library

4. Non-ARL Public Library
5. Other Library
6. Company
7. Other
8. Unknown

6 Discussion

The frequency of coded message topics discussed on AUTOCAT suggests that AUTOCAT is a mailing list used for multiple purposes. There is no one single topic that has a substantially higher frequency than the others. Monographic item-specific cataloging issues, general cataloging standards, professional issues, and technology are each discussed at a frequency between 15.7% and 19.6%. The topic category that stands out as being discussed less than the others is non-monographic item-specific cataloging issues. This may be due to the fact that other mailing lists exist for the purpose of covering special formats such as the Serials in Libraries Discussion Forum (SERIALST) for serials and the Music Library Association Mailing List (MLA-L) for music materials. The topic called other, which is not about one of the five identified cataloging issues, accounted for only 18% of the messages.

Approximately 80% of messages posted to AUTOCAT are a response to an existing thread. Twelve percent of the messages posted are asking a question or are posted with the intent to start a discussion. The frequency of coded message functions compared to the job titles of the posters shows that slightly over 50% of messages intended to begin discussions are posted by users that self-identify as a cataloging librarian or metadata librarian. This is disproportionate to the total number of messages posted by cataloging librarians or metadata librarians, which is only 40%. Also, 56% of threads that are meant to ask a question or initiate discussion are started by users

associated with a non-ARL academic library. Only 30% of total messages are posted by those affiliated with a non-ARL academic library. This suggests that AUTOCAT is being heavily used as a resource for individuals who work at non-ARL academic libraries, perhaps because they may be smaller and have fewer resources than large ARL academic institutions. This may indicate that there is a need for continuing education classes for catalogers who work at non-ARL academic libraries. Eight percent of messages have the function of being announcements such as job postings or calls for papers. The announcements do not function as replies to other posts, nor do they function as posts that invite responses. However, there are responses that are written to announcement threads even though the original posts were not intended to stimulate responses.

The results of coding self-identified job titles show that the largest single type of posters, at 40% of posts, are cataloging librarians or metadata librarians. This is followed by unknown, meaning posters who do not identify their job titles in the signature of their posts, with 32% of messages. Other librarians, the posters who self-identify as librarians but do not have cataloging or metadata in their job title, make up 17% of posters. Posters who have job titles that signify that they are neither a cataloging librarian nor another type of librarian accounted for 9% of postings. One surprising finding was that library science graduate students and recent graduates rarely post to AUTOCAT, or if they do post, they do not identify themselves as students or recent graduates.

When looking at message topics posted by job title, the findings suggest that cataloging librarians, metadata librarians and other librarians post within the topic of monographic item-specific cataloging issues at a much greater rate than other users.

Monographic item-specific cataloging issues make up approximately 19% of posts by cataloging librarians and metadata librarians, and 18% of posts by other librarians, compared to approximately 11% of posts by those with a job title in the other or unknown categories. Those with a job title coded as other use AUTOCAT to post about professional issues in about 30% of their posts, a much higher rate than those with differently coded job titles. They are also the least likely to make “off-topic” posts, or posts with topics that are classified as other. This relative focus on professional issues is probably the result of human resources personnel often falling within the coding as the other job title classification. Those users with unknown job titles are the least likely to post about professional matters, and the most likely to post messages with topics classified as other.

Fifty percent of messages are posted by individuals affiliated with an ARL or non-ARL academic library. The findings show that posters are more likely to include their institutional affiliation in their signature than their job title. Approximately 17% of posts list no institutional affiliation, while 32% of posts do not identify job titles. Interestingly, given the leadership role that the Library of Congress plays in cataloging, only about 3% of posts are written by someone associated with the Library of Congress. It might be that cataloging librarians who work at the Library of Congress are wary of posting personal messages that could be misinterpreted as representing the institution as a whole rather than themselves as individuals, or perhaps they lack the time to participate in such an active mailing list, but it might be beneficial to the cataloging profession as a whole if the Library of Congress chose to play a greater role in the professional cataloging discussions that are occurring on AUTOCAT.

7 Summary and Conclusion

The research for this Master's paper was conducted in order to identify the major topics that are discussed in the daily work life of cataloging professionals. It was also conducted to find out the frequencies and major types of message functions, the frequencies and major types of author job titles, and the frequencies and major types of author institutional affiliations. The findings of the study indicate that AUTOCAT is being used by cataloging professionals as a resource for answering monographic item-specific cataloging questions, especially for message posters who are affiliated with non-ARL academic libraries. Additionally, the study suggests that message posters who are affiliated with ARL libraries spend more of their posts talking about general cataloging standards and policies rather than immediate item-specific cataloging questions. Other cataloging topics that seem to be heavily discussed on AUTOCAT are professional concerns and technology issues.

A recommendation for cataloging professionals as a result of this study is that library graduate students who are interested in cataloging participate in the discussions occurring on AUTOCAT for a valuable introduction into the profession that does not require any commitment in terms of time or money. Another recommendation is that cataloging professionals take advantage of AUTOCAT as a way to launch discussions about the future of cooperative cataloging in an environment that involves a large number of other professional catalogers as well as professionals from other disciplines who are concerned stakeholders in the future of the cataloging profession.

Future research needs to be conducted to compare the topics discussed on other professional electronic mailing lists in librarianship with those discussed on AUTOCAT. One reason to conduct future research is to discover if the lists have overlapping topics, or if there are other professional mailing lists that have coverage of substantial non-overlapping cataloging topics in their discussions. Another reason to conduct additional research is to find out if other professional cataloging electronic mailing lists are as multi-purpose for discussion topics as found on AUTOCAT, and if they are serving the same types of professionals as AUTOCAT. Another study might seek the reasons that catalogers are using electronic mailing lists in addition to the myriad of other tools that are potentially available to them. Finally, it might be worthwhile to analyze the messages posted to AUTOCAT from 1991 to the present time to see how communication and themes on the list have evolved.

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9 Appendix

Codebook for Content Analysis

Unit of Analysis: Email Message

Message Topic:

1. Monographic Item-Specific Cataloging Issues: Description Areas, Transcription, Capitalization, Punctuation, Names, Series, Subject Headings, Library of Congress or Dewey Decimal Classification, Cuttering
2. Non-Monographic Item-Specific Cataloging Issues: Audiovisual Material, CDs, Maps, Electronic Books, Serials, Other Formats
3. General Cataloging Standards, Models, Policies: Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, Second Edition (AACR2), Machine-Readable Cataloging (MARC 21), Library of Congress Rule Interpretation (LCRI), Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR), Resource Description and Access (RDA), Encoded Archival Description (EAD), Dublin Core (DC), Text Encoding Initiative (TEI), Metadata Object Description Schema (MODS), Metadata Encoding and Transmission Standard (METS)
4. Professional Issues: Education, Job Interviews, Job Requirements, Job Advertisements, Conferences, Publishing or Presentation Calls, Publications
5. Technology Issues: Catalog Maintenance, Typo Cleanup, Integrated Library Systems, Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC), Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), Other Cataloging Software and Tools

6. Other

Message Function:

1. Question or Initiation of Discussion
2. Answer or Reply
3. Report Error in OCLC Record or Request Enhancement
4. Announcement: Daily Typo, Conference, Job Advertisements, etc.

Job Title:

1. Cataloging Librarian or Metadata Librarian
2. Other Librarian
3. Library Graduate Student or Recent Graduate
4. Other
5. Unknown

Institutional Affiliation:

1. Library of Congress
2. Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Member
3. Academic Library (non-ARL member)
4. Public Library (non-ARL member)
5. Other Library
6. Company: Vendor, Publisher, Contract Cataloging Company
7. Other
8. Unknown