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Article:

Exploring the Impact of Addressing Classification System Bias in Higher Education Libraries in England

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Abstract: This qualitative research study explores the ways that academic librarians in England undertake and perceive classification and cataloguing work in order to engage in wider decolonization initiatives. The research consisted of semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis was used to identify key themes. The study found that the participant librarians highly value this work based on a perception of its moral importance, rather than concrete proof of impact. Benefits from a decolonization perspective were not always clear. Challenges include staffing shortages and technological limitations.

Introduction

The ubiquity of the Dewey Decimal and Library of Congress classifications in libraries around the world belies the subjectivity under which they were created (specifically, by late 19th and early 20th century Americans with, arguably, an agenda of preserving and promoting American interests).[1] The majority of UK academic libraries use either Dewey or Library of Congress, although other, more locally based systems do exist, and contain their own inherent biases.

General criticism of bias in library classification systems began in earnest in the 1970s and 1980s.[2] Decolonization, attempts to call out and dismantle colonial-era perspectives that still remain in research and scholarship, is a major concern of critical librarianship, and the wider academy, in the UK, and addressing bias in classification systems forms an important, if under-studied, part of this work. This research study aimed to discover the views of librarians undertaking this work, and their perception of the value of it.

Bias Is Inherent in Classification Systems

All library classification systems are a representation of how the culture that creates them structures its knowledge. Although both the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and Library of Congress (LOC) systems are regularly updated, they have not changed

fundamentally since their creation, and indeed it would be impractical to completely overhaul systems that support the majority of the world's libraries. As a result of the specific social, cultural and political milieu in which they are created, and the needs of the collections they were originally designed to support, they have biases in both terminology and structure that over time have become problematic historical remnants that persist today.[3] Sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, religion and legal status are all areas where the classification has not kept pace with society's values.[4] Libraries can respond to this bias in a number of ways, including: making changes to their own local classification systems; petitioning the editorial boards of the classification systems for changes; and raising awareness among students, faculty, and staff that this bias exists.

The UK Decolonization Movement
Decolonization is a contested term that has been used to cover a broad range of activity. In their book *Decolonising the University*, Bhambra et al. define it as "a way of thinking about the world which takes colonialism, empire and racism … as key shaping forces of the contemporary world, in a context where their role has been systematically effaced from view".[5] The aim of this thinking is to then counter the effects of these forces by making visible both the bias itself and the people and scholarship that this perspective have historically ignored. The calls for decolonizing UK education were amplified by the Rhodes Must Fall campaign, which began at the University of Cape Town in 2015. Rhodes, a British imperialist and mining magnate, was a dominating force in the European colonization of southern Africa. The protest to remove his statue from the University was later taken up at Oxford, where Rhodes also left a legacy in the form of the Rhodes Trust, and where the campaign continues its fight to decenter whiteness and dismantle imperialist structures in UK higher education.[6]

Universities have responded to this call to action in many different ways, from staff and student diversity recruitment initiatives to revising curricula and running workshops on rethinking research methodologies. One common practice in library decolonization specifically is to add more diverse authors and authors from the Global South to course reading lists[7]; another is to address the ongoing presence of colonial knowledge structures in classification systems. Examples of this include outdated or offensive subject classifications, and classification structures that prioritize Western publications or serve to "other" colonial

territories, ethnic minorities, or non-Western perspectives. Although perhaps not as visible as increasing diversity in reading lists, addressing classification bias represents a crucial effort towards dismantling some of the structures that uphold colonial-era knowledges and ways of looking at the world. This paper reports on research into the actions taken by UK academic libraries to address classification bias, as part of a larger effort to address the ongoing effects of colonialism in higher education.

Literature Review

This literature review summarizes the existing research into classification bias and cataloguing ethics, before examining the current state of diversity in UK academic libraries.

Research into Classification Bias

The bias present in library classification systems, specifically the DDC and LOC systems, is covered extensively in the literature. This bias can take a variety of forms, from outdated or offensive terminology to othering and exclusionary structures. This section summarizes research into bias, its history and impact.

Adler has written extensively about the classification of sexuality and race.[8] She dissects how the foundations of both DDC and LOC built bias into classification, presenting the systems (erroneously) as the rational and objective result of the Enlightenment belief that all knowledge can be captured and organized. She goes on to demonstrate that their development coincided with a period of nation-building that required a commitment to the idea of American supremacy, which only added to their subjectivity.[9] She is joined by Olson, who says this subjective focus might be acceptable in a single collection, but that it is the imposed universality of these two major systems that makes them especially problematic, and as Adler describes, an act of colonisation.[10]

Olson goes beyond history to analyze how, regardless of its origin, a classification system is designed to exclude, and to give power to the people doing the classifying, necessarily creating a "universality/diversity binary opposition" that is othering in its very nature. She has written repeatedly about how the need to locate books in a single location can lead to certain subjects or characteristics being prioritized over others in the hierarchy.[10] Howard and

Knowlton give examples of this in the Library of Congress through their analysis of classification within African American studies and LGBTQIA studies.[12]

Other studies into classification bias include Biswas, who reviews the "East Indian" subject heading in LOC to discuss the "problematic vestiges of colonialism" that still remain[13] and the video documentary *Change the Subject*, which followed the very public campaign by students at Dartmouth College to change the Library of Congress subject heading "illegal aliens."[14]

How Librarians Have Responded to Bias

Accounts of interventions that libraries have made to address classification bias fall into two categories:

- A practical approach, either through reclassification or revising subject headings in the catalogue
- A critical librarianship approach, which seeks not to eliminate bias but to educate students about its existence and how to operate within a biased system

This section surveys examples of both approaches.

Critical librarianship is at the heart of library activism regarding both decolonization and classification bias. A blog post from the Association of College and Research Libraries summarizes the definitions of critical librarianship from several library and information services scholars, who broadly define it as acknowledging both the conscious and unconscious shoring up of systems of oppression in libraries, inviting both librarians and users to think critically about and challenge these systems.[15]

There appears to be consensus that it would be impossible to create a single, bias-free system that would be appropriate in all libraries. Earlier librarian activists, notably Sanford Berman, did express the belief that working systematically through Library of Congress subject headings and making changes would fix the problem of classification bias, but, even in the span of his own career, terms that would once have been an improvement have themselves become problematic.[16] Rather than attempt to correct the entire system, Adler, Mai, and Olson all advocate for local solutions, for finding the most meaningful changes for an individual library or community.[17]

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Examples of this type of intervention include adding indigenous terminology to the LOC records of the Manitoba Archives; adding metadata descriptors in the native language of authors, in addition to the English-language record; combining sections of British, American and postcolonial literature into a single section of contemporary English literature; removing "Cw" from class marks that referenced nations formerly of the British Commonwealth; and giving feedback to vendors providing shelf-ready resources about the presence of outdated or biased metadata.[18]

For other librarians, a critical, dialectical solution is seen as more useful than a practical one. Drabinksi describes Berman's pragmatic approach as limited, and goes as far as seeing engaging in the act of reclassification or altering subject headings locally as participating in the same system of oppression – a performative activism that isn't a real solution.[19] Instead, she advocates for a critical pedagogy approach – to teach students to think critically about the subjective nature of classification, rather than trying to fix something that she believes fundamentally cannot be fixed. Examples of this in her own work include an application of queer theory to LOC subject headings, and examinations of the colonial structures that underpin the LOC classification hierarchy.[20]

Examples of this critical pedagogy approach can also be found in the work of Howard and Knowlton, who advocate for creating interdisciplinary LibGuides to support researchers as they navigate the shortcomings of classification systems,[21] and Duarte and Belarde-Lewis, who examine the possibilities of using indigenous, community-based approaches to information to challenge the hegemony of traditional structures of knowledge. In the UK, Clarke shared examples of how the library at Goldsmiths, University of London is addressing classification bias through education, including creating and running "resistance researching" workshops.[22]

Ethics in Cataloguing

The value of cataloguing and classification to students is clear – making the resources they need accessible and easy to find. Beyond that, cataloguing ethics and the value they can bring to an institution are also frequently discussed in the literature.

Hoffman states that despite claims that cataloguing is focused on the needs of users, the standards have not been based on an understanding of users' needs. Her research finds that the expectation falls on the individual cataloguer to customize the bibliographic record, but they in turn are not aware of the needs of their users. Efficiency drives, including the move towards purchasing shelf-ready books from vendors, makes customization at the local level increasingly difficult.[23]

A Cataloguing Code of Ethics was published in January 2021, created by and for cataloguers in the UK, Canada and the US. It's mission statement expresses "a desire for the creation of a framework that provides guidance and examples of ethical dilemmas in our work in order to clarify best practices".[24] The steering committee is in the process of collecting case studies that reflect the tenets of the new code, but had published only four short examples as of March 2022.[25]

Cataloguing ethics has been under discussion for some time. Martin traces the conversation from the earliest developments of cataloguing standards, through an increased awareness of ethics that started in the 1970s and continues today. She concludes that the current issues in cataloguing ethics include "neutrality, inclusivity, self-determination, and privacy" and that ethical considerations should be applied by everyone working with library metadata.[26]

In 2020, Snow and Shoemaker explored how practitioners of cataloguing define cataloguing ethics. They found that definitions varied widely among practitioners, and that in many cases their definitions went beyond that of the American Library Association code of ethics in their discussion of the prevalence of bias throughout the cataloguing process.[27]

The Current UK Academic Library Environment
The ability of libraries to address classification bias could be affected by current trends that have deprioritized cataloguing, the lack of diversity in the workforce and the increased need to measure impact and demonstrate value. This section reviews these factors.

The Shift to a Service Model
Academic libraries in the UK are going through a shift in priorities, with many moving from a collections focus to a service focus.[28] For some libraries, this means fewer resources and

work hours being given to cataloguing. Cerbo outlines the debate over the future of cataloguing, as budget constraints and non-catalogue discovery tools compete with the increased information and technological demands required to create and maintain digital repositories that support institutional needs beyond the library catalogue. However, Turner examined cataloguing job advertisements from 2016 to 2018 and concluded that cataloguing as a skill is still in demand. The study was limited in scope, and did not answer the question of the relative stability in the number of cataloguing and metadata positions over time, but it does suggest that these skills are still required in libraries despite the shifting trends and priorities.[29]

Diversity in Higher Education

Black and minority ethnic (BAME) student attainment in the UK falls below that of white students. In the 2017–18 academic year, the gap between white and BAME students gaining a first or upper second-class degree was 13.2%, with their pre-university performance unable to explain this gap in attainment.[30] More broadly, correlation has also been found between library usage and student attainment in the United States and the UK.[31] BAME students also report feeling held back from academia by feeling unwelcome. For example, a survey conducted by the Oxford University Student Union's Campaign for Racial Awareness and Equality found that "59% of BME students felt 'uncomfortable/unwelcome' because of their race or ethnicity."[32]

In their book *Rhodes Must Fall*: *The struggle for justice at the heart of empire*, contributors discuss the experiences of BAME students at 'monocultural' institutions such as Oxford, and stress the importance of higher education institutions listening to students, actively work against normalizing whiteness and making BAME students feel seen and represented by the instutition.[33] The position of the library profession in responding to increased calls for diversity, inclusion and social justice is problematized by the demographic makeup of its workforce. A 2015 survey found that 96.7% of the UK workforce in library, archive and information management professions identify as white.[34] Black academics have expressed frustration and burnout at being expected to shoulder more of the burden of tackling inequality than their white colleagues.[35]

The Need to Measure Impact

Mai discusses the power of classification to marginalize, pointing out that the assumption that libraries are neutral, objective spaces only provides a cover for continued exclusion. Yet she also asks what the benefit of changing biased systems might be.[36]

In 2019, a conference took place at Cardiff Metropolitan University titled "Decolonising Library Collections and Practices: From Understanding to Impact". Many of the presentations from this conference indicate that this work has moved from the "understanding" (learning) to the "impact" (taking action) phase, but none of the conference speakers presented any data that gave an indication of the impact of their work.[37]

A recent survey of BAME librarians by the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) revealed feelings that discussing equality and diversity in libraries is lip service, and that no meaningful action will come from it.[38] Mai points out that there will always be a tension between the conceptual criticism of classification and the need to have concrete solutions.[39]

Literature Review Summary

There is ample literature that examines existing biases in library classification systems, and their potential for harm. There are also examples of interventions that librarians can make to address bias. There is a gap in the literature when it comes to showing evidence of the impact of these interventions. The research findings and discussion presented in this paper will explore these gaps by focusing on UK libraries and investigating how they are measuring impact.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research project was to investigate the perceived value of work of academic librarians in the UK who have undertaken projects to address classification or cataloguing bias as part of decolonization efforts within the university, either through reclassification or related activity.

Informed by the literature review, two research questions were developed to address this aim:

1. What different approaches are UK academic libraries taking to address classification bias in the context of decolonization? What are the benefits and challenges of the different approaches?
2. How is work on classification bias perceived within UK academic libraries, in the wider context of decolonization work?

The subsequent objectives of the research were as follows:
- To investigate the experiences of UK academic librarians of decolonization work in the context of classification and cataloguing
- To explore the value of the various cataloguing and classification decolonization interventions from the perspectives of the librarians
- To understand if/how the impact of library-driven interventions is being measured

Method
Research Approach
Because the experiences of academic librarians was required in order to inform this research, a qualitative method was chosen. This was primarily because of the need to gather data on participants' perceived impact of the work they were doing, and their feelings and opinions about the work and its value. The approach was grounded within an interpretivist paradigm which encompasses the concept that "realities are multiple, constructed and holistic," that they are embedded in context, and in the case of qualitative research, results are shaped by the interaction between researcher and subject.[40]

The chosen data collection method was that of semi-structured interviews, conducted individually so that participants could respond honestly and not feel they were being observed by colleagues or others in the same field. The aim was to draw out their individual experiences as well as their personal reactions to and beliefs about the work. It allowed the participants to discuss their experience in their own words, without the need to focus on positive outcomes.

Sampling
The participant sample needed to be purposive, in that subjects had to work at an academic library or archive in the UK, and have some involvement in a project that addressed

classification and cataloguing bias in the context of decolonization. Information professionals who had undertaken wider decolonization efforts in libraries not related to cataloguing and classification were excluded, as were librarians from institutions not connected in some way to higher education. There were no restrictions on the role or professional level of the participant, nor the nature of the intervention, as long as they met the basic criteria described above.

Homogeneity among participants was not required beyond meeting the basic research criteria. Neither was heterogeneity of participants specifically sought out (Robinson, 2014). The goal was to elicit the individual perceptions of the librarians and not to draw any general conclusions about their particular demographic group.

Blogs, conference presentations, library websites and articles librarians had written about their work in this area were used to identify potential interviewees. The project was designed to explore how UK universities specifically address decolonization of their classification and cataloguing. Librarians from all four UK nations (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) were contacted.

Although the project was planned as an investigation into the work of UK librarians, all the respondents worked in England, so there was no representation from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. Each of those nations has their own relationship to British colonialism, and therefore would potentially have unique insights or interventions into how they address bias in their libraries. Such insights did not form part of the results of this research.

Sample Size
The sample size was carefully considered to determine a number that would provide a robust amount of data but not be impractical to manage. The aim was to interview seven to ten people, enough to gather data on a broad spectrum of experiences, but to make sure that the data fit within the scope of a small research project and limited time frame (Robinson, 2014).

Sourcing
Contact was made by emailing people directly to describe the project and invite them to be interviewed. This yielded three participants. Snowball sampling, in which people who had

been contacted recommended others, yielded another four. Convenience sampling was employed because specific individuals were not being sought – anyone who met the criteria for the research was a potential subject.

To make sure that a sufficient number of participants was found, a broader sampling technique was also used. A request for interviews was sent to the LIS-DECOLONISE mailing list via JiscMail, which hosts email lists for people working in education and research in the UK (https://jiscmail.ac.uk). A call for interviews was also included in the July 2021 newsletter of the Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals' Community, Diversity and Equality special interest group. These interventions yielded another three participants, bringing the total to ten. The research sample consisted mainly of librarians from higher education institutions. One participant (Participant 2) is employed by a heritage library that hosts university researchers. Participant 5 is an archivist within the special collections team at a university. Within libraries there was a range of roles represented, from assistant librarian to library director. See Table 1 for the list of interviewees.

Data Collection
Once initial contact had been made, there was a discussion to determine if the work of the potential interviewee was appropriate for the research objectives.

A total of ten semi-structured interviews were conducted online during June and July 2021, with librarians from nine different libraries. The need to conduct the interviews online was the result of COVID-19 restrictions and not related to the specific aims for data collection (University of Sheffield, 2020).

Interviews took place over Google Meet video conferencing. One interview (Participant 2) was conducted with audio only. Interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes. Google Meet was used to record the audio and video. A secondary audio recording was taken on an iPhone. Google Meet captions were captured via the Tactiq Chrome extension, which formed the basis of the transcripts (https://tactiq.io/). The reviewer then listened to the recordings and corrected any errors to create the transcripts. Transcripts were then anonymised to remove the names of all individuals, institutions and other identifying information.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview transcripts in order to uncover important themes in the data, rather than to develop new theory. Importance can be judged by the number of occurrences of the theme in the data set, as well as the judgement of the researcher.[41]

The interviews were analyzed for key themes using a constant comparative approach, which was designed for working with large amounts of descriptive data and in which the data are compared to "develop conceptualizations of the possible relations between them".[42] The categories or themes thus develop out of the data gathered, and are not created *a priori*. Continuous comparison was used to code the data, following a three-step process described by Pickard[43]:

      1. Open coding – in which categories are identified

      2. Axial coding – in which links are made between categories and sub-categories

      3. Selective coding – in which the themes are further refined

Coding began after the first interview, by noting down categories that emerged from the conversation. Each subsequent interview provided an opportunity to revisit and expand the categories. Analysis continued until theoretical saturation was reached and no new insights were emerging from the data. Coding was conducted and managed using NVivo software (NVivo for Mac, Release 1.5).

Data Presentation

The data from this project are presented below in the form of anonymized quotes from the interviewees (numbered from 1 to 10; see table 1).

[insert table 1]

Findings

Research Question 1: What different approaches are UK academic libraries taking to address classification bias in the context of decolonization? What are the benefits and challenges of this work?

Inspiration and Motivation for the Work

The approach taken by the interviewees was shaped by the motivations for undertaking the work in the first place. The impetus to undertake work on classification bias came from a variety of sources. Several participants mentioned that student activism was a motivation, with one librarian giving an example of students specifically asking the library to reclassify, not just address decolonization generally:

> "Probably three or four years ago, there was a very public open letter to the English faculty, which basically directly implicated the library and library classification, in their calls to decolonize. So, they were saying, why is the postcolonial literature separate from the rest of English literature and down in the basement away from the rest of the runs? And so one of their demands was to reclassify." (Participant 4)

For others, the decision to look into classification bias came from their own perception of their collections:

> "We both kind of opened up the existing catalogue, saw all of this, you know, all of these racist slurs, absolutely nothing to kind of quantify or explain. And we were like, ok, yeah. We need to do our best here." (Participant 5)

> "It just seemed old-fashioned to me, really. I'm not sure it was actually causing any problems or any issues for any library users, but it just seemed like, just, wrong, really." (Participant 9)

Conversations with colleagues also served as inspiration to examine their classification and cataloguing practices. Multiple participants mentioned the influence of the documentary

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Change the Subject, about the student campaign to change the Library of Congress subject heading "illegal aliens" (Baron, 2019).

> "Some of my colleagues there had been following what was happening in the United States with all that controversy about the subject heading "illegal aliens". … Anyway, we looked at our catalogues and, lo and behold, we had that subject heading. So, we all decided to change it." (Participant 8)

> "The obvious one was illegal aliens, because a lot of us went to the premiere of *Change the Subject* and those of us that were there kind of agreed that this is something that we should change." (Participant 3)

Types of Intervention

There were a variety of approaches that participants took to address classification and cataloguing bias. Some chose physical reclassifications, while others focused on updating subject headings and raising student awareness of the existence of bias.

<u>Reclassification</u>

One (Participant 7) removed the "Postcolonial" subcategory in the literature section, while another (Participant 9) chose to divide the classification for Africa and Latin America into subsections for individual countries. They also reclassified to remove Western European bias:

> "Originally, if a book was about European art, it would be in a book called Art in General. And if it was about Asian art, it would be in a section called Asian art. If it was about Italian art, it would be in a section called Italian Art. So, the main change was that the European art and the Western art got moved into geographical sections." (Participant 9)

For one librarian, a plan to just revise subject headings turned into a full reclassification project:

"She said, well, this is offensive too. Are we going to change these? And she kind of picked up the ball and started running with it, and got back to me with a spreadsheet of suggested new call numbers. And I thought, well, she's already done the work, so we'll change the subject headings and the call numbers this time." (Participant 8)

Revising Subject Headings

For others, the priority was on changing the subject headings rather than the call numbers or locations of the books.

"But the cataloguing I mean, I think that's probably a good place to start because it's something visible to the world, where we should start chipping away at things." (Participant 6)

"It's not actually for shelf location, it's to make sure that the online browsing functionality for the whole library, that our material slips into it, so that people could do digital browsing and our stuff will just pop up." (Participant 1)

Awareness Raising

For others, the goal was to encourage critical reflection on classification bias. One participant ran a workshop looking at offensive subject headings in their collection, with the goal of then updating those records. Another participant shared that in their library, the intention was to retain the existing subject headings (alongside updated terminology) for their educational value.

Approaches to the Work

There were some common threads in how to approach the work that appeared across different types of intervention. While several participants mentioned that planning was very important, and advised other librarians to make sure they set aside enough time for it, one participant acknowledged a sense of frustration in trying to "get it right".

"At the moment there's no book written about it, which I think, as librarians, we struggle that there's not a book to go to that's, like, the Holy Grail of what we're meant to do, because we like standards and rules. … It still feels all kind of a bit like, oh, what's the right thing to do? And everyone's absolutely terrified of making a mistake. But I think my advice would be that … if you make a mistake, you just own it and be just like, we're trying. I think people just respect that." (Participant 1)

Several people mentioned the importance of involving students, particularly BAME students. The lack of diversity in library staff was acknowledged by multiple people, who encouraged an approach that involved seeking input from diverse communities, while not taking their participation for granted.

"If you are a predominantly white, which we are, engage with students and academics of color who want to be involved and want to give you advice, and actually listen to them, don't pay lip service to them." (Participant 1)

"Paying indigenous people for their expertise in re-envisaging what the classification scheme could be. Otherwise, we're working with just our bias – like, we're all white in the library. We're working with our own biased perspective to reclassify." (Participant 4)

"We were very conscious coming into it that we were neither American nor African and we wanted to do our best to kind of reflect those communities and reflect how they would think about themselves and, where possible, try and let those organizations lead." (Participant 5)

Benefits and Challenges

<u>Benefits</u>

It was expressed in the interviews that this work is part of the overall role of librarian as service provider.

"Because you're not just doing that for yourself. It's always for readers. It's always for others, it's the whole ethos of libraries." (Participant 2)

The benefits of the work were both practical, in making resources easier to find, and educational, incorporating awareness of bias into the information literacy taught to students. For one researcher, running the workshops on classification bias combined all the benefits, while also giving the librarians a steer in how to proceed with future reclassification work:

"Democratizing that process and bringing it to students as well was so valuable. We learned a lot from them, and I think they got a real sense of the library in quite a different light. … We asked for their feedback and quite a lot of them said, you know, I didn't even know about subject headings, now I'm going to use them. So, on just like a core kind of information literacy level, it was really useful for them, but also in terms of like, you know, if I'm searching for this stuff, I might not be able to just use the terminology that I know is appropriate. Because in the library, they're using different terminology that is historical or used in a different context or whatever. And actually, their search strategies need to reflect the systems that they're working with, if that makes sense." (Participant 4)

Challenges

Capacity of staff was regarded as the biggest challenge, namely not having dedicated cataloguing librarians who could devote themselves more fully to reclassification work. One participant summed it up as follows:

"None of us are solely cataloguing or anything … it's just one thing amongst everything else that we're doing. So yeah, it is hard with a small team. … Because I think actually, if you had a team of dedicated cataloguers, it would be quite easy to say to them, this is part of your job now. … But when cataloguing is maybe 10% of your time, to then make a whole project that's going to take thousands of hours, is quite a big thing." (Participant 4)

"I'm really overworked, and I make time for this project because it's something I'm passionate about. I know not everyone else is and they've got a million other things to do, and this is not the right time, but I think this is probably what a lot of libraries are coming up against, when trying to do projects like this." (Participant 3)

Similarly the capacity and capability of the available technology proved problematical. This was particularly the case when it came to subject heading revisions in that the capabilities of the library management system (LMS) had a sizeable impact on the feasibility of this work. For one librarian, the limitations of their LMS meant that their plans to revise subject headings had to be abandoned in favor of other decolonizing work:

"We changed to a new LMS, library management system, in 2014, I think. Which – it was open source and no one else uses it basically, and it's extremely user unfriendly. … One of our goals when we started the group … [was] to change just five subject headings, as a pilot, not all of them, just five of them, which seemed manageable at the time. But then we found out that we can't do global edits automatically … so then it kind of went on the back burner. And it's still something that kind of annoys me at the back of my mind, that this was the original thing that I thought would be easy and that really needed to be done and it just hasn't happened." (Participant 3)

However, for librarians with different systems, the technology was a help, not a hindrance:

"I didn't really get around to changing "illegal aliens" to "undocumented persons" until the summer. But I just ran a batch job on the library management system and then changed it. And that was that really. Job done. It only took a day. … And we check periodically that no new instances of that have happened. And if they have then we run the same job." (Participant 8)

Research Question 2: How is work on classification bias perceived within UK academic libraries, in the wider context of (or outside of) decolonization work?

The Value of Their Work

All participants viewed the action they were taking to address classification bias as beneficial, but several expressed doubt that this value was perceived by students, and even other librarians. One participant was reluctant to give her work undue value:

> "I don't want to kind of elevate what I've been doing with my colleague into the status as like a 'project'. I think that's almost like too … yeah, it's kind of bigging it up too much." (Participant 4)

Another participant felt that in her workplace, there was a sense that addressing bias and thinking about decolonization was not something all library staff should be concerned with:

> "I get the feeling people think this isn't common, this is not for everybody. This is for the subject librarian. This is for high up. And I think that we shouldn't have that attitude. It should be, you know, immersed in everybody's work, day in and day out." (Participant 6)

It became clear in the interviews that whilst participants found reclassification work valuable, they were unsure if that value was perceived by non-librarians.

> "We didn't change the call numbers on those items then because we thought that it was only the subject heading that was offensive. And to be quite honest, having worked in university libraries for a while, it's only cataloguers and people who classify who understand how the class marks are derived." (Participant 8)

> "Classification is so … it's like a behind-the-scenes thing. And I think that's the reason why it gets so much less attention than stuff like reading list changes. And, you know, decolonizing the collections, which are kind of much more visible, high-profile elements of this kind of work – reclassification basically just is like a lot of time and

effort. You've really got to want to do it, I think. Which is also why we've kind of stumbled a bit. Because it's very labor intensive." (Participant 4)

Feeling Supported by Management

All participants felt supported by their library managers to do this work. "Open-minded and appreciative" (Participant 7), "positively disposed" (Participant 8), "great" (Participant 2), and "keen" (Participant 1) were used to describe the attitudes of managers when these projects were proposed or discussed. Some managers went beyond personal support to recognize the work more formally through establishing operational groups and working groups in order that the decolonization work was sustained.

For one participant, this acceptance by management was seen as crucial to be able to proceed with the work and for it to gain traction in the institution more widely.

> "I don't know if you could have that impact without the support when it comes to the hierarchies that we work in. … That is really key [to] have that leadership behind the work." (Participant 10)

However, support from management did not extend to ringfenced work hours, additional staffing support or funding for work on classification bias and decolonization. Two participants (1 and 5) were each hired onto short-term projects to catalogue a collection (which was previously uncatalogued) and in this meant that decolonizing efforts were rolled into their work from the outset of these cataloguing projects. For the rest of the participants, working towards decolonizing the library was treated as a side project to be fitted in around their main responsibilities.

> "I proposed it to my line manager. His only concern was time management. He said, well, if you manage to fit it in with all your other duties, I see no problem with this. And I then reassured him and said, yeah, I can, I can fit it in." (Participant 2)

Even the director of a university library with a very high-profile decolonization platform defines this work as an addition to standard librarian duties:

> "I mean, you know, it's whatever time they can devote to it. If it's not possible, then it's not possible. … Because we're not really in that kind of luxury of, you know, you can spend four hours a week on this particular area. It is more like trying to do that work as and when as part of their day-to-day job." (Participant 10)

Measuring Impact

Most evidence of the impact of these projects was anecdotal. It was also largely positive – no participants suggested that they had received any negative feedback.

In instances where there was believed to be tangible impact (e.g., increased circulation of the reclassified books), no data had been collected to back up such claims, although a few participants expressed an interest in pursuing this type of data in the future. The participant who had run the workshop asking students to critique their subject headings did include a survey, in which students had very positive feedback and said they learned a lot about bias as well as classification/cataloguing generally.

One participant shared an example of a change that had taken place among the faculty as a result of the library's work, but this was an outcome of library liberation work more widely, and not a specific example of addressing classification bias:

> "We arranged meetings with all heads of academic departments or heads of learning and teaching committees in academic departments to talk about what we were doing in the libraries, of our decolonization work, and also to find out what they were doing and how we could then, you know, work in partnership or share our knowledge to connect. It was very much a mixed bag, some were quite advanced in the work, some were at the very beginning. … But after a few occasions, when meeting with the library, they did then go on and create their groups. So, that was really great, to know that we had that kind of impact." (Participant 10)

The themes in this section moved beyond the nature of addressing classification bias, to consider how the participants viewed their own work, as well as how they felt this work is seen by others. Interviewing these participants about their experiences allowed for an exploration of their feelings about the work and went beyond merely recounting the details of what they had done. The implications of these results are discussed in the next section.

Discussion

Research Question 1: What different approaches are UK academic libraries taking to address classification bias in the context of decolonization? What are the benefits and challenges of this work?

Inspiration and Motivation
Having student activism inspire this work and for participants to express the importance of involving students in this work reflects the general trends in this area of librarianship, as seen in the *Change the Subject* documentary and in the suggestions from Mai and Olson, who advocate for finding solutions that are most meaningful for the community the library serves.[44] It is also reflective of the origins of decolonization in the UK and reflects the current need in university libraries to prioritize student feedback.

Approaches to the Work
The participants who chose more student-facing interventions, workshops and awareness raising activities reflect the accepted concept that bias will always be present in classification and that critical pedagogy is preferable to attempts to "fix" classification bias in practical terms.[45] For the participants who did choose physical reclassification projects, the benefits were clear, but were not entirely focused on critical librarianship and information literacy. They also included improving discovery generally and making cataloguing easier, which suggests decolonization was not the sole motivator for those types of projects.

Benefits and Challenges
While no one doubted the benefits of this work, the challenges were numerous. The best approach for tackling classification bias will depend on a number of factors, and libraries will have to evaluate the nature of their collection, the level of outreach or teaching they are able to do, their IT and network infrastructure, and what they can achieve with the staff they have.

What works will be different for every library because of the large number of factors involved, and likewise decolonization will take very different forms depending on the collections held by the university.

Rather than a clear delineation between the benefits and challenges, some of the areas raised by participants – such as technology – were regarded as both benefits by some participants and as challenges by others. This again highlights the very contextual nature of these projects, and that there can be no "one size fits all" model to addressing classification bias.

The current UK academic library environment, in which budgets are tight, cataloguing staff numbers are declining and focus is moving elsewhere, makes it increasingly difficult for libraries to take on these potentially large-scale projects. But as several participants suggested, the hope is that eventually this will be rolled into standard operating procedure for libraries, and therefore will not require specialist interventions that are seen to be taking time away from other tasks. The outsized role that technology played in helping or hindering these projects also suggests that, with the right technical solutions in place, this work need not be arduous and could be rolled into existing workloads without requiring significant staff time. This would likely apply more to updating subject headings (and therefore online discovery) than updating physical class marks, but the data suggests that subject heading interventions were seen as more meaningful and more visible than class marks to library users.

The topic of diversity within library staff did arise, but was not framed particularly as a challenge in the interviews. Participants who brought up the fact that they were white did so within the context of acknowledging that they did not want to be viewed as an authority on how to tackle bias, stating the importance of seeking advice from BAME communities. Specific instances of this happening did not emerge from the interviews, but, as raised in the literature review, it is important that white librarians do not shy away from taking on this work, so as to avoid putting increased pressure on their BAME colleagues.[46] Participant 4 expressed an interest in paying Indigenous community members to consult on their classification scheme, but that was a wish for the future that had not yet become a possibility.

Research Question 2: How is work on classification bias perceived within UK academic libraries, in the wider context of (or outside of) decolonization work?

The Value of Their Work
Despite having a sense of the importance of decolonization, and the presence of bias in classification systems, the language of the participants suggested a reluctance to assign too much value to their work, or to think that it should matter to anyone not working in cataloguing. This raises the question of why they felt the need to do this work, and could also explain why effort is not being put into formally monitoring its impact.

Feeling Supported by Management
Support and encouragement by their managers was acknowledged across all the interviews, but it was perceived as almost exclusively emotional, and for most participants, did not result in any tangible assistance. The idea that librarians are being encouraged to take on work beyond their normal responsibilities, yet still feel supported by their managers, is a concept that warrants further study.

How can the impact of this work be measured?
Finding examples of the ways that libraries are recording the impact of addressing classification bias was a key objective in this project. Library work outputs and outcomes are often measured or monitored in order to demonstrate value and impact of such work. However, there was a consensus that this work addressing classification bias did not necessarily need to be monitored, possibly because it was regarded as 'the right thing to do', and because universities are under scrutiny to take action on decolonization in as many ways as possible. That fact that, in most cases, no additional resource was given to the library for the work could be another reason why justification of such work through monitoring was not required –as it was not drawing funds or staff away from other library functions. This finding was in contrast to the literature review, which suggested that libraries are under more pressure to gather and respond to student feedback, and demonstrate the value of their services. The view of some participants that students do not notice nor care about cataloguing and classification suggests a reason for libraries not being concerned about student feedback in this area; however, if they are taking the time to address decolonization of their catalogue, then it could be argued that the onus is on libraries to educate students about the significance

and value of these changes, to demonstrate their commitment to decolonization and to the information literacy of their users.

Conclusion

Classification bias may not be as visible as the ethnic diversity of the workforce or the curriculum, but its role in controlling access to information and knowledge makes it both a metaphor for colonization, and, in the global dominance of Dewey and Library of Congress classification, an act of colonization itself. By addressing this, UK libraries show they are willing to engage with dismantling structures that are, unintentionally or through benign neglect, perpetuating inequality in UK universities and contributing to an unwelcoming environment for BAME students. Actions that work to dismantle a pervasive culture make it progressively easier for people to speak up and for change to happen. By sharing their experiences, the participants in this research are giving more visibility to this frequently unseen but important area of work.

The themes that emerged in the interviews all suggest a disconnect between the moral value of addressing classification bias, and value assigned to the actual day-to-day, extremely time-consuming act of reclassifying. The latter must be done to create the former, yet the results of these interviews suggest that the participants are unwilling or unable to assign a level of importance to the delivery of this work that reflects their feelings about its outcomes.

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