

Sorting the Unsortable: Visualizing Intersectionality in Knowledge Organization

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Including human groups in bibliographic classification, in principle, provides a means for library users find information about specific groups for personal or formal research. Increasing recognition of intersectional identities has led to problems in classifying them. In identity studies, intersectionality has been recognized as an important, yet confounding problem, one that also occurs in knowledge organization. Intersectionality scholars study the locations where two or more marginalized identity categories transformatively interact, which can conflict with aspects of either of the original categories in terms of power distribution and location within the social structure. An intersectional identity may limit one's ability to access social or individual power available to those in dominant, singular categories.

In knowledge organization, intersectionality manifests itself in the classificatory location and the representation of intersectional identities, which in turn can affect retrievability and shelf location, and thus, access. Faceted classification, pre-coordinated, or multiple subject headings are currently used to capture intersectional categories. But the structural models used by these knowledge organization systems are predicated on essentialist notions of human groups and can omit or obscure important aspects of intersectional identities in practice.

The presentation briefly provides epistemic underpinnings of intersectionality and how that relates to problems caused in a bibliographic context. Visual representations will show the classification of works on very specific intersectional identities, how hierarchy fails intersectionality, how facets can mitigate but not solve the intersectionality conundrum, and the philosophical and practical dangers of going broad and going narrow.