

Questioning authority: an analysis of descriptive fields in authority records

KATHY WISSER

A 2018 email exchange on the Program for Cooperative Cataloging email list (PCCList@listserv.loc.gov) included a heated discussion around the usefulness and appropriateness of information around sexual harassment and assault allegations in individual authority records. Archival authority records have consistently included more descriptive information than traditional bibliographic authority records, but with the introduction of Resource Description and Access, a broader descriptive information strategy was adopted across authority initiatives. The RDA/MARC Working Group then introduced a series of fields to contain descriptors associated with an identity represented in the record. The inclusion of these descriptors calls into question the purpose of authority records in the context of other information systems such as Wikipedia, ORCHID, SNAC and other identity management platforms. This work-in-progress research focuses on the use of these 3xx fields in existing authority records. Using the corpus of authority records from the Library of Congress Name Authority File from 2016 as the basis for sampling, this presentation will discuss the history of authority work, current scholarship on authority work that calls into question the purpose of that work. This is done through the examination of data in three fields: the 372 Field of Activity, the 373 Associated Group and the 374 Occupation. The presentation will conclude with some questions to consider in terms of where certain information belongs, such as the issues that sparked the email exchange in 2018.

About the author:

Kathy Wisser is an associate professor and Associate Director at the School of Library and Information Science at Simmons University. She also serves as the Director of the Archives Management Concentration and co-director of the Dual Degree program in Archives and History. She has published in various peer-reviewed journals, such as *Library Hi-Tech*, *Journal of Library Metadata*, *American Archivists*, *Archival Science*, and the *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*, and has served as guest editor for *Journal of Library Metadata* and *Journal of Archival Organization*. In August 2021, she will be inducted as a Fellow in the Society of American Archivists.