

Drag Storytimes and Bibliographic Invisibility: A Comparative Analysis of Picture Book Subject Metadata

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Abstract: Historically, library materials about diverse identities have often been subject to what Gough and Greenblatt (1992) term "systemic bibliographic invisibility," the use of "outmoded, prejudicial, inadequate, or inappropriate terminology" (61) within bibliographic records to describe an item's contents. Using such terminology within subject metadata can make materials challenging to find within a library's catalog, restricting users' access to the materials and the ideas they contain. Prior work has demonstrated that folksonomies like LibraryThing may better represent the multiplicity and fluidity of marginalized identities. In this study, we analyze the subject metadata associated with a corpus of picture books read during drag storytimes, comparing the inclusion of different types of subject metadata

found in bibliographic records from the Library of Congress catalog and LibraryThing. Specifically, we analyze the use of terms that explicitly describe various facets of human difference and those that refer to diverse elements within the books in more generalized or implicit terms within the bibliographic records of picture books that include depictions of LGBTQIA+ characters and/or themes, BIPOC characters, and characters with disabilities, developmental differences, and chronic illnesses. LibraryThing records contained a higher prevalence of subject metadata types across nearly all book categories, indicating that users assign more of a variety of types of subject metadata than do professional catalogers. Implications for the discoverability and accessibility of children's materials depicting marginalized identities are discussed.

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1.0 Introduction

Diversity in children's literature is essential in addressing the biases and prejudices that can develop in early childhood (Nel 2017; Brown 2021). As the oft-quoted Bishop (1990) aptly stated, books can function as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors, allowing children to see themselves reflected in the stories they read, gain insight into the experiences of others who are different from themselves, and develop empathy and a change in perspective.

Incorporating diverse books within storytime programs is one way that children's librarians can work to address bias and oppression by offering programs that reflect the diversity of today's world, part of the critical competencies of the profession (Association for Library Service to Children 2020). As Bratt (2022, 26) argues: "We librarians can be the ones, through our storytimes, to show the vast array of humanity, normalizing all people and talking positively about difference. Librarians have the power to make different people or experiences either visible or invisible in the storytime space".

There is a growing body of evidence indicating that drag storytimes include representations of diverse identities in the books chosen for these programs, including characters of various gender identities, sexualities, races/ethnicities, and disability statuses (e.g., Barriage et al. 2024; Naidoo 2018). In particular, books read at drag storytimes often explicitly focus on LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual, and more) identities and themes to both visibilize and normalize them, which offers children the opportunity to see identities, families, and experiences that may look like their own or like those of others around them (Barriage et al. 2024; Naidoo 2018).

Historically, library materials about diverse identities have often been subject to what Gough and Greenblatt (1992, 61) term "systemic bibliographic invisibility," the use of "outmoded, prejudicial, inadequate, or inappropriate terminology" within bibliographic records to describe an item's contents. Using such terminology within subject metadata can make these materials challenging to find within a library's catalog, restricting users' access to the materials and the ideas they contain. Scholars concerned with the bibliographic invisibility of materials related to race/ethnicity (e.g., Strottman 2007; Snow and Dunbar 2023), disability (e.g., Johnson and Forsythe 2019; Watson and Schaefer 2023), and LGBTQIA+ identities (e.g., McClary and Howard 2007; Adler 2009), have primarily focused on subject access related to adult and/or young adult library materials. In this study, we focus on materials for children – specifically, we analyze the subject metadata associated with picture books featuring diverse identities and/or themes read during drag storytimes, focusing on gender identity, sexual orientation, gender roles/stereotypes/norms, race/

ethnicity, and disabilities, development differences, and chronic illnesses (DDDCI).

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Drag storytimes

Drag storytimes are children's events that feature drag performers (including drag queens, drag kings, and non-binary and gender non-conforming performers, among other forms of drag artistry) reading children's books and engaging in other storytime activities. These events were initiated in 2015 in Canada as Drag Queen StoryTime, hosted by Reelout Arts Project Inc. (<https://www.reelout.com/about/dragqueenstorytime/>), and in the United States as Drag Queen Story Hour (now named Drag Story Hour [DSH]), founded by Michelle Tea and queer literary-arts organization RADAR Productions (<https://www.dragstoryhour.org/about>). DSH has developed into a network of self-managed and financed chapters in the United States and internationally (Montague and Latham 2019). However, drag storytime programming does not always follow the DSH model. Many libraries and other institutions (e.g., community spaces, bookstores) host such programs independently or in collaboration with LGBTQIA+ organizations within their communities (Barriage et al. 2021; Naidoo 2018).

Public libraries and other institutions hosting drag storytimes often promote them as general inclusivity programming (Naidoo 2018). Such promotion focuses on the benefits of storytimes for children and families, most of whom are not LGBTQIA+. Benefits evidenced in the research literature include increasing family interactions by facilitating open and honest communication and exposing attendees to gender-expansive concepts (Montague and Latham 2019; Radis et al. 2022), which can lead to increased knowledge and acceptance of diverse gender identities and expressions (Radis et al. 2022). Some promotion of storytimes focuses on rainbow families (families with LGBTQIA+ parents and/or children) and gender-diverse children specifically (Naidoo 2018). Benefits to these audiences include rainbow families feeling seen and included and gender-diverse children feeling supported in their identities, which can lead to better mental health outcomes (Westwater et al. 2019). Drag storytimes may also be framed as programs that focus on messages related to human difference, acceptance, and inclusion more generally (Kitzie et al. 2022; Staino 2017; Radis et al. 2020).

Many drag storytime performers have experience and training in early childhood education (Barriage et al. 2021; Kitzie et al. 2022; Montague and Latham 2019). They wield this experience to significant pedagogical effect, as evidenced in publications authored by performers that outline the dramaturgical and pedagogical strategies and benefits

inherent in drag as an art form (Dorsey 2020; Keenan and Lil Miss Hot Mess 2020). A key benefit of storytimes is imparting critical literacy skills that allow children to interrogate gender and other social structures that promote “normalcy”, which enhances their engagement, enjoyment, and literacy development during storytimes (Sipe 2008).

In addition to the art of drag performance and storytime activities, the books performers read are a critical event component. Many public library staff members who have hosted drag storytimes report using children’s books with LGBTQIA+ and/or gender-non-conforming characters (Barriage et al. 2024; Naidoo 2018). For some children, these programs may be the only instances of library programming in which they are exposed to books that feature LGBTQIA+ characters and themes. For example, a recent survey found that less than half of public library respondents reported offering LGBTQIA+ programming (e.g., Pride storytimes) other than drag storytimes (Naidoo 2018), while an analysis of the picture books read during public library storytimes noted that only one book out of the corpus of 160 featured characters who could be characterized as LGBTQIA+ (Cahill et al. 2021). Public library staff also report incorporating books in drag storytimes that feature various diverse identities in addition to LGBTQIA+ characters, such as characters of various races/ethnicities and characters with DDDCI (Barriage et al. 2024), aligning with the aim of promoting diversity and inclusion more generally.

However, not all books read at drag storytimes include diverse identities and themes (Barriage et al. 2024). Research has consistently shown that there is a lack of diversity in the picture books published each year (Larrick 1965; Adukia et al. 2023), which is likely a contributing factor. Another factor that may contribute to the lack of diverse books in drag storytimes is that such books only sometimes align with the best read-aloud practices. For example, one library director stated: “Some of the books about diverse gender expression can be long and we have an audience of very young children at these programs” (Naidoo 2018, 19). To help mitigate these factors, library staff frequently work with drag performers to select books for use in drag storytime, providing recommendations of specific books that work well as read-alouds and fit within the storytime’s theme and/or guidelines for making book selections (Barriage et al. 2021; Condren 2018; Naidoo 2018); however, the problem persists.

2.2 Subject access and metadata

One strategy that library staff, drag performers, and patrons alike may use to identify picture books with diverse identities and/or themes is through subject searches in library catalogs. Subject headings, such as Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and Children’s Subject Headings (CSH), pro-

vide standardized terms that describe the subject matter of a particular item, and librarians will assign these to items while conducting a subject analysis during the cataloging process (Hoffman 2019). Subject headings provide an access point for users when looking for information in various systems (Joudrey and Taylor 2018). Yet, determining the “aboutness” of an item is a subjective conceptual activity (Hauser and Tennen 2019), one that is often taken for granted and rarely critically examined (Holley and Joudrey 2021). Scholars who question how subject headings are developed and applied argue that their seeming neutrality often hides sociopolitical biases (Olson 2001; Drabinski 2013). People depend on a variety of values (i.e., functional, social, moral) when designing systems (Nissenbaum 2001; Friedman et al. 2013), and these values translate into the tools and structures they develop (Winner 1980). Depending on how these values are expressed, either explicitly or implicitly, will contribute to the fallible representation, or often lack of representation, of marginalized identities in library catalogs and controlled vocabularies. The failure to adequately include diverse identities in surrogate records results in information becoming “either unfindable or unusable by members of marginalized groups” (Dobreski et al. 2022, 490-491).

Since users rely on information infrastructures to guide their information-seeking process, this dependence results in using controlled classification systems which hinder adequate knowledge production (Bowker and Star 2000; Cifor and Rawson 2023). Yet, not all contemporary information systems assign subject access points using a controlled vocabulary.

For instance, the online social cataloging platform LibraryThing allows users to apply their own tags to items. Tags are composed of single words or phrases that users apply to items to describe their content (Rolla 2009). This kind of uncontrolled vocabulary provides a way to move beyond traditional subject classifications based on literary warrant to ones based on ‘user warrant’ and the language of the end-user (Moulaison and Bossaller 2017). Comparative studies of applied LCSH and LibraryThing tags have found that there tends to be a disconnect between the two schemes when used to classify LGBTQIA+ materials (Adler 2009; Rolla 2009) and materials about ethnic minorities (Bates and Rowley 2011). Similar discrepancies have been observed when comparing the language used to describe disabilities in LCSH and user-generated tags on Archive of Our Own (Johnson and Forsythe 2019). Although the reasons for these misalignments need further evaluation, one reason might relate to what Wagner (2022, xii) argues is catalogers’ hesitation in describing humans in surrogate records because of “given societal complexities around identities”. This observation, in part, reflects how the political and ethical landscapes associated with cataloging practices ultimately lead to the increased invisibility of marginalized identities.

Although subject headings and tags have received much attention in the scholarly literature, little work has focused explicitly on subject metadata assigned to children's literature. One example of such work is that by Mendell and Sarles (2010), who found that LCSH at that time did not include any subject headings to describe donor conceived people (e.g., children conceived via egg and/or sperm donation). As Mendell and Sarles (2010) note, this made finding books on this specific topic quite challenging, demonstrating the "systemic bibliographic invisibility" of marginalized materials described by Gough and Greenblatt (1992, 61).

More recently, Williams (2017) analyzed the subject headings assigned to books for children and young adults with diversity-related content (specifically, books focused on topics related to race/ethnicity, LGBTQIA+ identities, and disability/illness). Nearly 86% of the 120 books analyzed in this study included at least one subject heading explicitly related to its diverse content. However, a higher proportion of the LGBTQIA+ books did not have at least one explicitly diverse subject heading in their catalog records than the records of books focused on race/ethnicity and disability/illness. Williams (2017, 17) noted that some of the catalog records for the LGBTQIA+ books instead contained what they termed "fluff" subject headings, "ambiguous or seemingly meaningless" subject headings that do not explicitly communicate the diverse content. Williams (2017) suggests that applying such 'fluffy' subject headings instead of those that explicitly reflect a book's diverse content may reflect a move towards normalizing LGBTQIA+ content; however, it may also make these books more challenging to find in a library's catalog.

3.0 Current study

This comparative study examines the presence of explicitly diverse and 'fluffy'^[1] subject metadata within the metadata records of a corpus of picture books read during drag storytimes featuring diverse identities and/or themes in the Library of Congress Catalog (LCC) and on the LibraryThing platform. Within this corpus, our focus is on books with characters/themes related to gender identity, sexual orientation, and gender roles/norms/stereotypes (combined within the LGBTQIA+ category), characters who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), and characters with DDDCI. Specifically, our analysis aims to answer the following:

RQ1a: What frequency/percentage of picture books with LGBTQIA+, BIPOC, and DDDCI characters and/or themes read during drag storytimes have explicitly diverse, fluffy, and other subject headings assigned to their bibliographic records in LCC?

- RQ1b: How do these percentages differ based on book type?
- RQ2a: What frequency/percentage of picture books with LGBTQIA+, BIPOC, and DDDCI characters and/or themes read during drag storytimes have explicitly diverse tags, fluffy tags, and other tags assigned to their metadata records in LibraryThing?
- RQ2b: How do these percentages differ based on book type?
- RQ3a: How prevalent are explicitly diverse, fluffy, and other subject metadata for picture books with LGBTQIA+, BIPOC, and DDDCI characters and/or themes read during drag storytimes in LCC versus LibraryThing?
- RQ3b: How do these proportions differ based on book type?

4.0 Methods

The analysis reported here builds on a larger, multi-phase project examining drag storytimes in public libraries. Previous phases of the study included a survey of library staff and interviews with library staff and drag performers related to their perceptions of and experiences with drag storytimes (Barriage et al. 2021; Kitzie et al. 2022; Oltmann et al. 2023), as well as a content analysis of diversity in picture books read during drag storytimes (Barriage et al. 2024).

4.1 Initial sample

An initial list of picture books read during drag storytimes in public libraries was generated by: 1) reviewing news articles and professional/scholarly literature on drag storytimes to identify specific titles of picture books read during drag storytime events; 2) reviewing the transcripts of interviews with drag performers and library staff working at libraries that have hosted drag storytimes for mention of specific titles of picture books read during drag storytime events; and 3) a brief survey of library staff who have hosted drag storytimes in the past.

This process resulted in a list of 103 picture books after removing duplicates and book titles that were either generic or did not match any record in WorldCat (a bibliographic database combining data about items in library collections worldwide; <https://worldcat.org>). Complete details related to the generation of this initial list are reported elsewhere (Barriage et al. 2024).

4.2 Data collection

We obtained subject headings assigned to the picture books from LCC (<https://catalog.loc.gov/>). As these books are children's materials, their bibliographic records contained

subject headings drawn from LCSH and/or CSH. We recorded subject headings from both/either of these two controlled vocabularies included in each book's bibliographic record into a spreadsheet. See Figure 1 for an example of a bibliographic record in LCC for one of the books in our corpus.

We accessed LibraryThing (<https://www.librarything.com/>) tags manually since the API has been discontinued. Once each book's metadata record was located, we used the "show all tags" and "numbers" filters, indicating the frequency with which each tag was applied. We recorded all tags for each book in a spreadsheet and then sorted tags by



LIBRARY CATALOG

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

LC Catalog Quick Search

BOOK

Bunnybear

Full Record MARC Tags

Personal name
Loney, Andrea J., author.

Main title
Bunnybear / Andrea J. Loney ; pictures by Carmen Saldaña.

Published/Produced
Chicago, Illinois : Albert Whitman & Company, 2017.

[Request this Item](#) [LC Find It](#) [Item Availability](#)

LCCN Permalink: <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016029491>

Description: 1 volume (unpaged) : color illustrations ; 23 x 28 cm

ISBN: 9780807509388 (hardback)

LC classification: PZ7.1.L6645 Bu 2017

Related names: Saldaña, Carmen, illustrator.

Summary: "Although Bunnybear was born a bear, he feels more like a bunny. He loves to bounce through the forest, wiggle his nose, and munch on strawberries. The other bears don't understand him, and neither do the bunnies. Will Bunnybear ever find a friend who likes him just the way he is?" -- Provided by publisher.

LC Children's Subjects: Bears--Fiction.
Rabbits--Fiction.
Individuality--Fiction.

Figure 1. Partial LCC bibliographic record for *Bunnybear* by Andrea Loney, including subject metadata assigned from CSH.

frequency, keeping the top ten tags for each title as these are both the most used and the most visible tags when using the LibraryThing platform. In some cases, there were more than ten tags for a book when the tenth place had a tie (i.e., all tags that tied for the tenth place were included in our analysis). In other cases, we included fewer than ten tags as we only selected tags that two or more people had applied. While LibraryThing does include information about the frequencies of applied tags, we did not include that information within this analysis. See Figure 2 for an example of a LibraryThing record for one of the books in our corpus.

Two books did not have records in either LCC or LibraryThing and were thus excluded from further analysis, leaving a total of 101 picture books that had records in LCC and/or LibraryThing.

4.3 Data analysis

Once all subject headings and tags were collected for the final list of 101 picture books, these subject metadata were coded for the presence of subject headings/tags that were explicitly about topics and/or themes related to LGBTQIA+ identities (coded as “explicit - LGBTQIA+”; for example, the subject heading “Gay parents”), race/ethnicity (coded as “explicit - race/ethnicity”; for example, the LibraryThing tag “African American”), or DDDCI (coded as “explicit - DDDCI”; for example, the subject heading “People with disabilities”), those that were more generalized and/or implicit (coded as “fluffy”; for example, the LibraryThing tag “inclusion”), and those that were unrelated to these diverse topics and/or themes more generally (coded as “other”; for example, the subject heading “Board books”). Two research team members independently coded the subject headings and tags for each book. The research team then met to discuss all discrepancies.

Using the results of the prior quantitative content analysis of the picture books in our sample (Barriage et al. 2024), we then coded for the presence of the following in each book (note that these categories are not mutually exclusive):

- Depiction of LGBTQIA+ lead and/or non-lead characters (e.g., *I Am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings 2014);
- Themes related to gender roles/stereotypes/norms (e.g., *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress* by Christine Baldacchino 2014);
- Themes with queer subtext (e.g., *BunnyBear* by Andrea Loney 2021);^[2]
- Depiction of BIPOC lead and/or non-lead characters (e.g., *We March* by Shane W. Evans 2016); and/or
- Depiction of lead and/or non lead characters with a DDDCI (e.g., *We're All Wonders* by R. J. Palacio 2017).

After we resolved coding discrepancies, we downloaded the coding results into Excel and cleaned the data, which involved converting all counts of LCC and LibraryThing subject metadata from a sum (e.g., four total explicit LCC subject headings for a certain book) to binary values where 1 signified that there was at least one subject heading/tag of that type and 0 signified that there were no subject headings/tags of that type. We then converted all book categories (e.g., LGBTQIA+ lead) to binary, categorical values (e.g., LGBTQIA+ lead, no LGBTQIA+ lead) to facilitate building of pivot tables. We then generated pivot tables that obtained the frequencies of books in various categories (e.g., LGBTQIA+ lead) with different types of subject metadata (i.e., explicit, fluffy, or other) divided by whether the metadata were from LCC or LibraryThing. We also generated tables tabulating the total number of books within a category, dividing the frequency of books with different subject metadata by total number of books in that category. This division gave the percentage of books in each category with a specific type of subject metadata. We then calculated the absolute value of the difference in percentages between LibraryThing and LCC.

<img alt="Screenshot of a LibraryThing book record for 'Bunnybear' by Andrea J. Loney. The page shows basic book info, member count (58), reviews (3), popularity (458,875), average rating (4 stars), and no conversations. Below this is a table of user-generated subject metadata with counts: Members (66), Tags (11), and various themes like acceptance, animals, bears, bears, bunnies, bunnies, confidence, identity, individuality, picture book, rabbits, and transgender. The 'Members' table includes columns for 'different is good', 'fiction', 'format-library-book', 'friendship', 'gender', 'goodreads-import-2023', 'age-grade-01', 'age-grade-02', 'age-grade-kindergarten', 'age-grade-1', 'age-grade-2', 'age-grade-3', 'age-grade-4', 'age-grade-5', 'age-grade-6', 'age-grade-7', 'age-grade-8', 'age-grade-9', 'age-grade-10', 'age-grade-11', 'age-grade-12', 'age-grade-13', 'age-grade-14', 'age-grade-15', 'age-grade-16', 'age-grade-17', 'age-grade-18', 'age-grade-19', 'age-grade-20', 'age-grade-21', 'age-grade-22', 'age-grade-23', 'age-grade-24', 'age-grade-25', 'age-grade-26', 'age-grade-27', 'age-grade-28', 'age-grade-29', 'age-grade-30', 'age-grade-31', 'age-grade-32', 'age-grade-33', 'age-grade-34', 'age-grade-35', 'age-grade-36', 'age-grade-37', 'age-grade-38', 'age-grade-39', 'age-grade-40', 'age-grade-41', 'age-grade-42', 'age-grade-43', 'age-grade-44', 'age-grade-45', 'age-grade-46', 'age-grade-47', 'age-grade-48', 'age-grade-49', 'age-grade-50', 'age-grade-51', 'age-grade-52', 'age-grade-53', 'age-grade-54', 'age-grade-55', 'age-grade-56', 'age-grade-57', 'age-grade-58', 'age-grade-59', 'age-grade-60', 'age-grade-61', 'age-grade-62', 'age-grade-63', 'age-grade-64', 'age-grade-65', 'age-grade-66', 'age-grade-67', 'age-grade-68', 'age-grade-69', 'age-grade-70', 'age-grade-71', 'age-grade-72', 'age-grade-73', 'age-grade-74', 'age-grade-75', 'age-grade-76', 'age-grade-77', 'age-grade-78', 'age-grade-79', 'age-grade-80', 'age-grade-81', 'age-grade-82', 'age-grade-83', 'age-grade-84', 'age-grade-85', 'age-grade-86', 'age-grade-87', 'age-grade-88', 'age-grade-89', 'age-grade-90', 'age-grade-91', 'age-grade-92', 'age-grade-93', 'age-grade-94', 'age-grade-95', 'age-grade-96', 'age-grade-97', 'age-grade-98', 'age-grade-99', 'age-grade-100', 'age-grade-101', 'age-grade-102', 'age-grade-103', 'age-grade-104', 'age-grade-105', 'age-grade-106', 'age-grade-107', 'age-grade-108', 'age-grade-109', 'age-grade-110', 'age-grade-111', 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5.0 Results

Ninety-two books had records in the LCC. Overall, thirty-nine books had explicit subject headings, thirty-two had fluffy subject headings, and ninety had other subject headings. Ninety-nine books had records in LibraryThing. Fifty-three books had explicit tags, fifty-eight had fluffy tags, and ninety-nine had other tags. Figure 3 shows the percentages of all books included in this analysis with each type of subject metadata in LCC and LibraryThing.

5.1 Picture books with LGBTQIA+ characters and/or themes

Forty-seven percent ($n = 47$) of all books reviewed ($N = 101$) had lead and/or non-lead LGBTQIA+ characters, themes related to gender roles/stereotypes/norms, and/or queer subtext. Eleven percent ($n = 11$) of books had an LGBTQIA+ lead character, eighteen percent had an LGBTQIA+ non-lead character ($n = 18$), seventeen percent ($n = 17$) included themes related to gender roles/stereotypes/norms, and eleven percent ($n = 6$) had themes with queer subtext. Across all subject metadata types (explicit, fluffy, and other), the frequency of LibraryThing tags exceeded the frequency of LCC subject headings (see Figure 4).

5.1.1 Explicit subject metadata

Nineteen percent ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 38, 81\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 29, 62\%$) more books with LGBTQIA+ characters, themes related to gender roles/stereotypes/norms, and/or queer subtext had explicit subject metadata in LibraryThing as compared to LCC. The largest difference in favor of explicit LibraryThing subject metadata was in books with queer subtext ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 3, 50\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 0, 0\%$), followed by books related to gender roles/stereotypes/norms ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 16, 94\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 13, 76\%$). There were also more books with explicit subject metadata in LibraryThing among books with LGBTQIA+ non-leads ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 14, 78\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 12, 67\%$) and LGBTQIA+ leads ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 10, 91\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 9, 82\%$).

5.1.2 Fluffy subject metadata

The differences between LCC and LibraryThing were particularly marked when considering fluffy subject metadata. Here, 45% ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 38, 81\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 17, 36\%$) more books with LGBTQIA+ characters, themes related to gender roles/stereotypes/norms, and/or queer subtext had subject metadata coded as fluffy in LibraryThing as compared to LCC. The largest difference was found when comparing the difference in books with LGBTQIA+ non-lead characters assigned fluffy subject metadata ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 14, 78\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 4,$

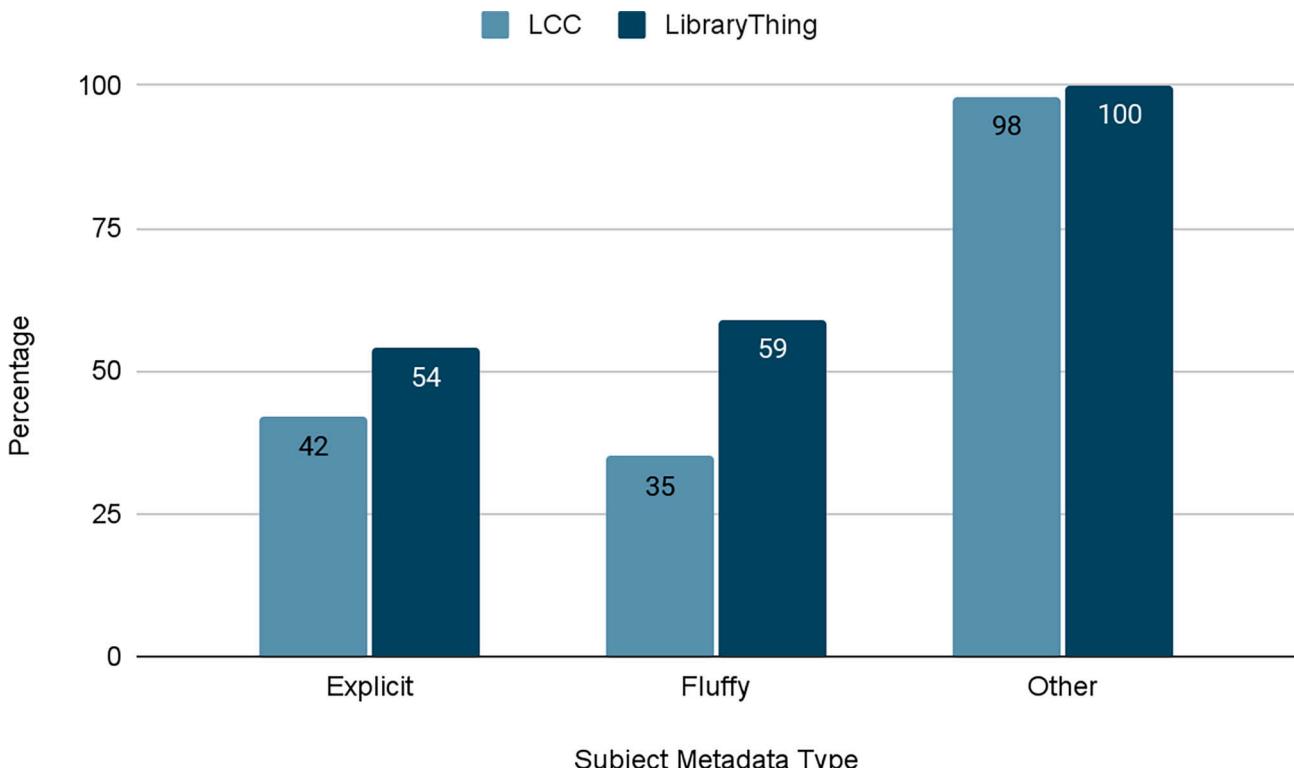


Figure 3. Percentage of books of all types with explicit, fluffy, and other subject metadata in LCC and LibraryThing.

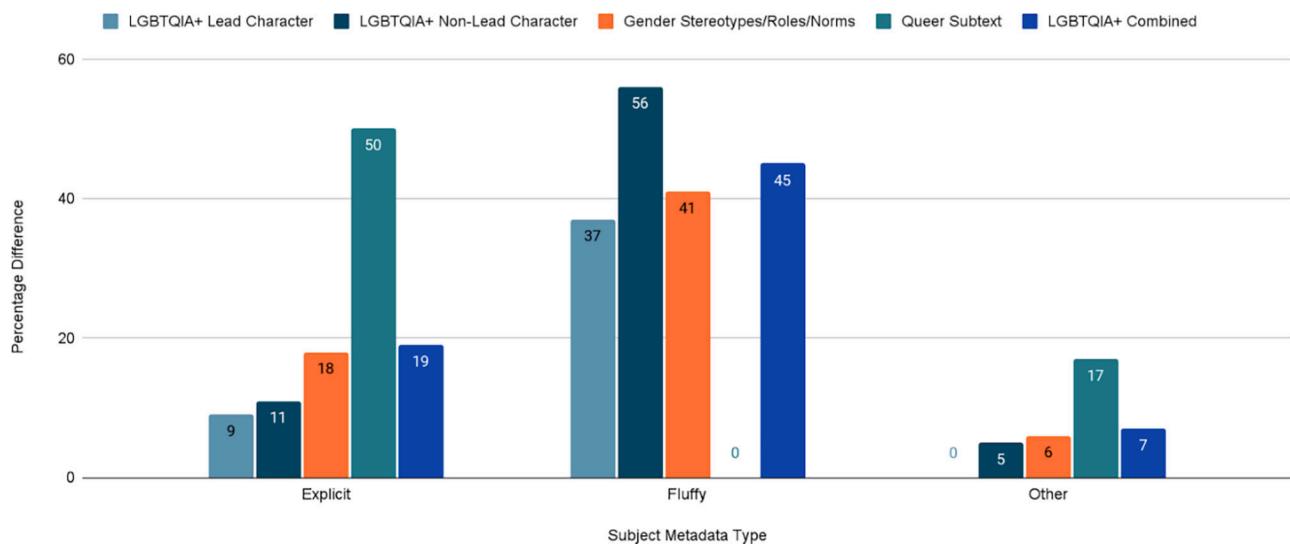


Figure 4. Difference in percentages between LibraryThing and LCC for each subject metadata type for books with LGBTQIA+ characters and/or themes. Positive values indicate LibraryThing had a greater frequency of metadata type than did LCC; negative values indicate LCC had a greater frequency of metadata type than did LibraryThing.

22%). Differences in books with LGBTQIA+ lead characters ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 7, 64\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 3, 27\%$) and themes related to gender roles/stereotypes/norms ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 13, 76\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 6, 35\%$) were a little less, but still pronounced. There was no difference among books with queer subtext regarding number of fluffy subject headings ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 6, 100\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 6, 100\%$).

5.1.3. Other subject metadata

Differences in subject metadata classified as other between LibraryThing and LCC were present, but lesser in degree compared to explicit and fluffy subject metadata. Overall, there was only a 7% ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 45, 96\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 42, 89\%$) difference in books with LGBTQIA+ characters, themes related to gender roles/stereotypes/norms, and/or queer subtext assigned other metadata in LibraryThing as compared to LCC. The largest difference was present for books with queer subtext at 17% ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 6, 100\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 5, 83\%$). Books with themes related to gender roles/stereotypes/norms ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 17, 100\%$, $n_{\text{LCC}} = 16, 94\%$) had a 6% difference in frequency assigned in LibraryThing versus LCC and books with LGBTQIA+ non-lead characters ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 17, 94\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 16, 89\%$) had a 5% difference. There was no difference ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 10, 91\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 10, 91\%$) between books with LGBTQIA+ lead characters assigned other subject metadata in LibraryThing and LCC.

5.2 Picture books with BIPOC characters

Fifty two percent ($n = 53$) of all books ($N = 101$) had a BIPOC lead character (15%, $n = 15$) and/or supporting char-

acter (52%, $n = 53$). The frequency of LibraryThing tags exceeded the frequency of LCC subject headings across all subject metadata types, with the exception of explicit subject metadata applied to books with BIPOC lead characters (see Figure 5).

5.2.1 Explicit subject metadata

The differences between LCC and LibraryThing in regards to explicit subject metadata assigned to books with BIPOC characters were small. LibraryThing records had a higher percentage of books in this category overall with explicit subject metadata than did LCC, with a difference of 2% ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 8, 15\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 7, 13\%$). These differences are the same for books with BIPOC non-lead characters only. However, explicit LCC subject headings for books with BIPOC lead characters exceeded LibThing tags by 7% ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 3, 20\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 4, 27\%$).

5.2.2 Fluffy subject metadata

The largest differences between the types of subject metadata applied to books with BIPOC lead and/or non-lead characters was in the fluffy category, where 36% more LibraryThing books ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 39, 74\%$) had this type of subject metadata compared to LCC ($n_{\text{LCC}} = 20, 38\%$). The same percentage and frequency differences in favor of LibraryThing applied to books with BIPOC non-lead characters. There was a 26% difference in favor of LibraryThing books with BIPOC lead characters containing fluffy subject metadata ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 11, 73\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 7, 47\%$).

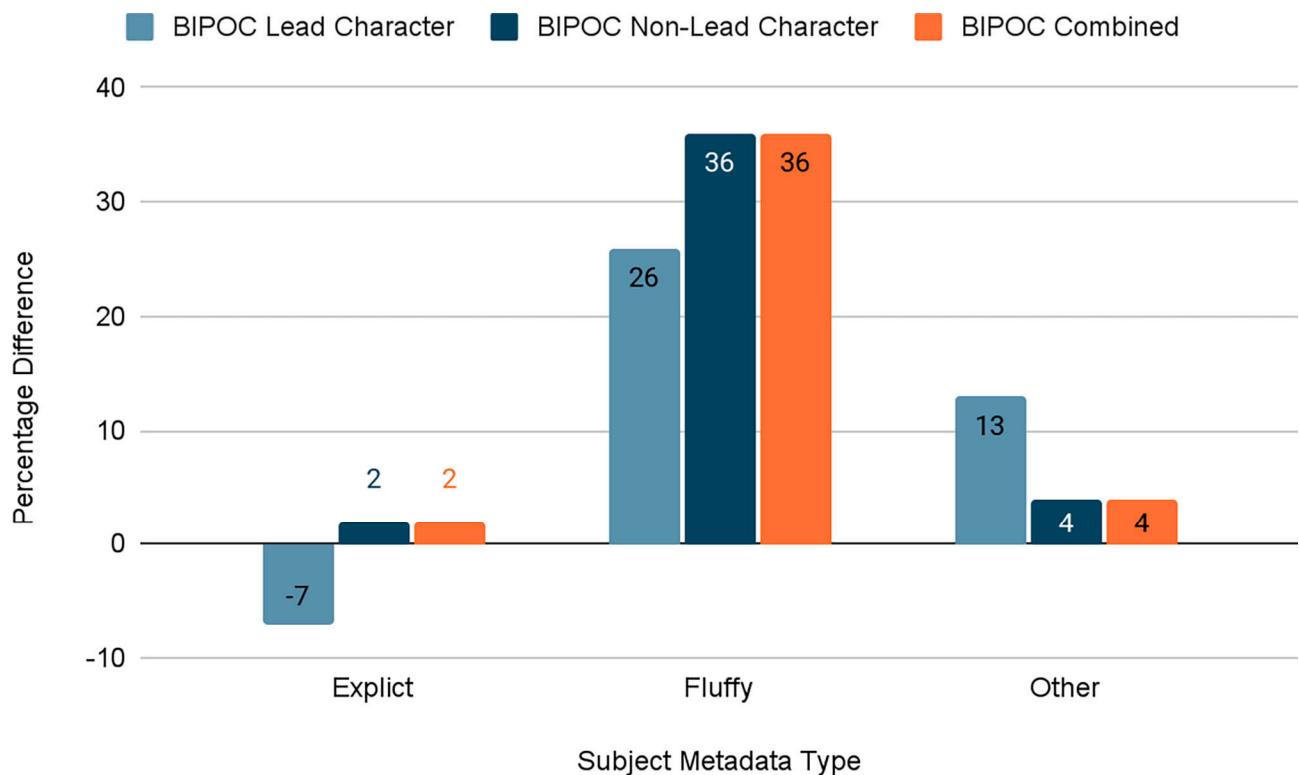


Figure 5. Difference in percentages between LibraryThing and LCC for each subject metadata type for books with BIPOC characters. Positive values indicate LibraryThing had a greater frequency of metadata type than did LCC; negative values indicate LCC had a greater frequency of metadata type than did LibraryThing.

5.2.3 Other subject metadata

Subject metadata classified as other was found in more records in LibraryThing than LCC, particularly for books featuring BIPOC leads where there was a 13% difference ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 15, 100\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 13, 87\%$). There were differences between books with BIPOC supporting characters and all BIPOC characters combined, but this difference was very small at 4% for both ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 51, 96\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 49, 92\%$).

5.3 Picture books with characters with a DDDCI

Fifty-seven percent ($n = 58$) of all books ($N = 101$) had a lead character (57%, $n = 58$) and/or a supporting character with a DDDCI (55%, $n = 56$). Compared to the other book types, there was the most variation between prevalence of subject metadata types among LibraryThing and LCC for books of this type (see Figure 6).

5.3.1 Explicit subject metadata

There were very slight differences in favor of LCC having more books assigned explicit subject metadata compared to

LibraryThing for all books with characters with a DDDCI ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 2, 3\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 3, 5\%$), as well as books with non-lead characters with a DDDCI ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 2, 4\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 3, 5\%$). There were 20% more books in LCC for books with lead characters with a DDDCI assigned explicit metadata than in LibraryThing ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 0, 0\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 1, 20\%$). However, it should be noted that these numbers are very small.

5.3.2 Fluffy subject metadata

When it came to fluffy subject metadata, all books with a character with a DDDCI in LibraryThing that were assigned fluffy tags outnumbered those with assigned fluffy subject headings in LCC at a 27% difference ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 39, 67\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 23, 40\%$). There was a similar 29% difference favoring the number of books assigned fluffy tags in LibraryThing among books with non-lead characters with a DDDCI ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 39, 70\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 23, 41\%$). However, there were more books with lead characters with a DDDCI assigned fluffy subject headings in LCC compared to LibraryThing tags, with a 20% difference ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 1, 20\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 2, 40\%$) although the total number of books was very small for this category.

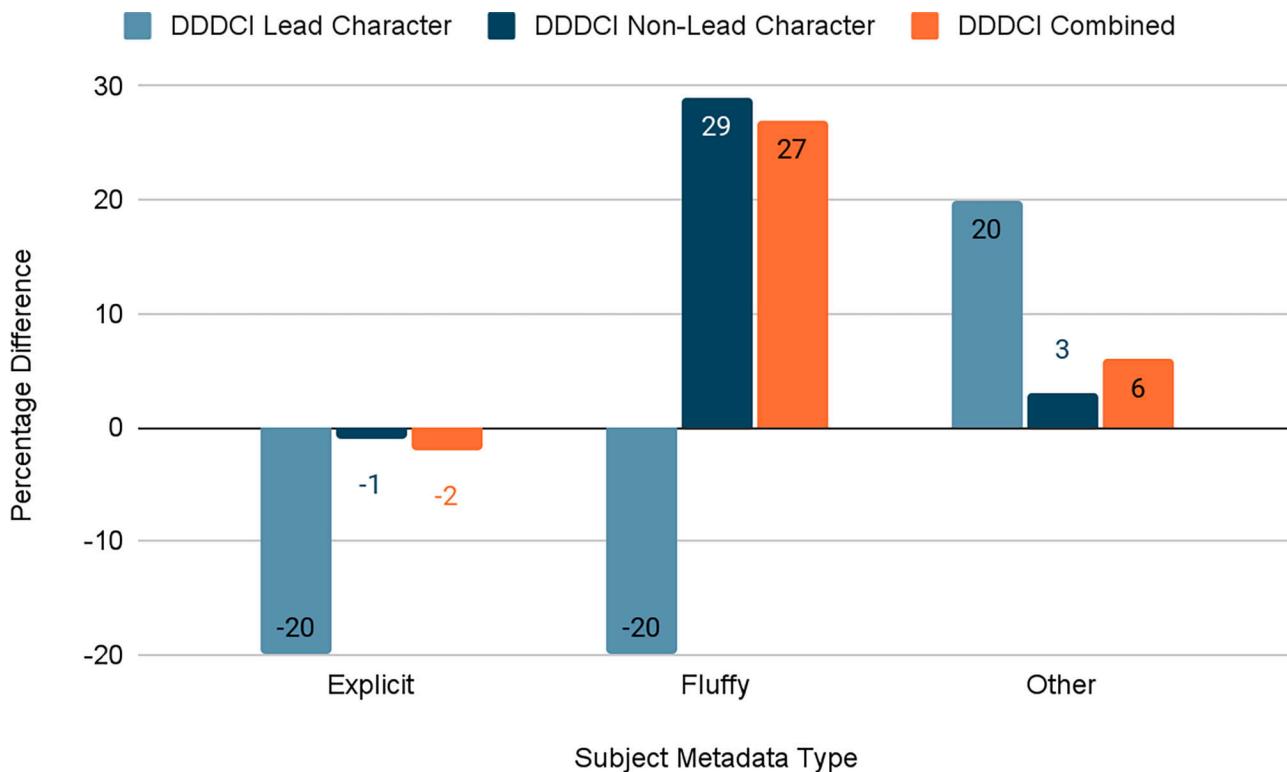


Figure 6. Difference in percentages between LibraryThing and LCC for each subject metadata type for books with DDDCI. Positive values indicate LibraryThing had a greater frequency of metadata type than did LCC; negative values indicate LCC had a greater frequency of metadata type than did LibraryThing.

5.3.3 Other subject metadata

There were minimal differences slightly in favor of LibraryThing books featuring characters with a DDDCI with subject metadata coded as other at 6% ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 56, 97\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 53, 91\%$). This difference was similar for books with non-lead characters with a DDDCI at a 3% difference ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 54, 96\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 52, 93\%$). Twenty percent more books with lead characters with a DDDCI had other subject metadata in LibraryThing as compared to LCC ($n_{\text{LibThing}} = 5, 100\%$; $n_{\text{LCC}} = 4, 80\%$), although again the total number of books was small for this category.

6.0 Discussion

This study found that users typically assign more of a variety of subject tags across the explicit, fluffy, and other categories in LibraryThing as compared to the variety of subject heading types assigned by librarians in the LCC for books that include LGBTQIA+, BIPOC, and DDDCI characters/themes. These findings align with previous research suggesting that uncontrolled vocabularies are less restrictive than controlled vocabularies (Rolla 2009; Johnson and Forstyre 2019). Uncontrolled vocabularies prioritize 'user war-

rant' over the traditional 'literary warrant' to determine an item's aboutness (Moulaison and Bossaller 2017). Our findings indicate that user warrant for children's materials may be quite different from literary warrant, with different types of subject metadata being applied by users than that assigned by librarians. In some cases and contexts, 'fluffy' concepts such as inclusion or individuality found in user tags may be more salient to users of children's materials than more explicit concepts such as cultural pluralism and feminism found in subject headings. Ultimately, this underscores the potential of user-generated tags to enhance the visibility and accessibility of diverse materials in library catalogs.

The higher prevalence of explicit user tags for books with LGBTQIA+ characters may reflect Wagner's (2022) assertion that catalogers are avoiding the application of identity-based subject headings in this context. However, explicit subject metadata were more frequently applied in LCC to books with BIPOC lead characters and both lead and non-lead characters with DDDCI as compared to LibraryThing. This may suggest that catalogers are less likely to apply identity-based subject metadata related to gender identity and sexual orientation than identity-based subject metadata related to race/ethnicity and DDDCI.

Although the frequency of tag and subject heading application in general, and of explicit terms specifically, offers valuable insights, a comparative analysis of explicit and fluffy subject metadata reveals the most compelling findings. This comparison may also shed light on the differing approaches catalogers and users take in applying subject metadata. Records in LibraryThing had a higher frequency of fluffy tags as compared to fluffy subject headings in LCC for all books with LGBTQIA+ characters, books about gender stereotypes/roles/norms, books with BIPOC characters, and books with non-lead characters with DDDCI. Although the use of fluffy subject headings might be seen as a way to make items more challenging to find in a library's catalog (Williams 2017), the same might not be true for the use of fluffy user-generated tags. This discrepancy may suggest that users on platforms like LibraryThing, who often generate tags based on personal interpretations and preferences, might apply broader, more generalized tags to engage a wider audience or to reflect personal understandings of diversity that differ from the more standardized subject headings found in LCC. Additionally, the predominance of fluffy tags could be influenced by a community-driven approach to categorization, which emphasizes inclusivity and accessibility over precise terminological accuracy. This again speaks to the methodological flexibility of user-generated tags and increasingly the findability of diversity-related children's books.

Notably, all books with queer subtext were assigned fluffy subject metadata in both LCC and LibraryThing. No book with queer subtext was assigned explicit subject metadata in LCC, while half were assigned explicit tags in LibraryThing. Although fluffy subject metadata can be used to obfuscate marginalized identities when used in conjunction with explicit labels, they bring attention to LGBTQIA+ themes that may otherwise be missed. This latter claim is especially valid given that subject tagging can be used to denote minor subject themes. This finding suggests that tags may be better at identifying LGBTQIA+ themes in children's literature because they provide a good way to signpost more inferred content. This finding supports the argument that using an uncontrolled vocabulary allows for a greater representation of marginalized identities. Visibility management is also an important factor to consider in regards to the subject metadata applied to books with queer subtext. Specifically, it can be subversive to minimize the visibility of books with queer subtext by not labeling them as such to extend their reach. When books and other forms of media contain queer subtext, consumers might not want others to know that this subtext is present – for example, if they are trying to privately explore their identity. Further, if books with queer subtext are not explicitly labeled as such, it can lead to readers being exposed to this content who otherwise would have not selected it, which can potentially lead to increased understanding and acceptance.

6.1 Limitations and future research

We acknowledge that our focus on picture books read during drag storytimes differs from the inclusion criteria of studies like Adler (2009), Bates and Rowley (2011), Williams (2017) and Johnson and Forsythe (2019). We believe that our approach uniquely captures the spectrum of diversity narratives present in children's picture books through its cultural and community context. This method embraces a wide array of themes, from books overtly focused on various facets of human difference to subtler explorations of difference and self-identity.

However, the specific books included in our sample may not be representative of children's picture books within the specific categories examined here more generally. For instance, as previously reported elsewhere (Barriage et al. 2024), nearly all books depicting a character with a DDDCI included characters wearing eyeglasses, with fewer books depicting characters with other types of DDDCI, such as characters who are blind or who use mobility aids. This may not be an accurate reflection of the larger body of children's picture books depicting characters with DDDCI; thus, our findings may not be generalizable to children's picture books more broadly.

Additionally, our analysis does not take into account the extent to which characters of various identities were integral to the books' storylines, aside from distinguishing between lead and non-lead characters. Diverse characters may be incorporated into picture books via what Izienicki (2022, 1100) has termed "backgrounding," with such characters included in the background of the story's main action (consider, for example, a Black character or a character who uses a cane depicted in a crowd scene on a single page). The inclusion of such characters may not warrant the application of relevant subject metadata in LCC or in LibraryThing. Future research examining identity-related subject metadata in children's picture books should include an analysis of the centrality of characters of various identities to each book's storyline and the influence this may have on the assigned subject metadata.

As previously noted, little work has examined subject metadata within the context of children's materials. In addition to diverse and fluffy subject metadata, nearly all records in both LibraryThing and LCC contained other metadata, or metadata that was unrelated to the diverse characters and/or themes present. This indicates that diversity is only one element considered sufficiently pertinent by both librarians and the general public when describing children's materials. Future research should continue to explore the application of subject metadata to children's materials by both information professionals and the general public, as well as the use of such metadata when retrieving children's materials for use in professional and personal contexts. Such

research could yield important insights that may influence the accessibility of diversity-related children's materials as well as children's materials more broadly.

7.0 Conclusion

Our comparative analysis demonstrates that surrogate records for books read during drag storytimes within the LCC and the LibraryThing platform contain subject metadata that is explicitly diverse, reflecting the various identities and themes they contain, as well as fluffy subject metadata, representing diverse content in more ambiguous or implicit terms. The prevalence of explicit and fluffy subject metadata is influenced by the type of book being described, as well as the type of catalog used. Librarians and drag performers selecting books to read during drag storytimes may want to tailor their searches accordingly in order to retrieve a range of potentially suitable options.

It is important to emphasize that we are not solely advocating for increased use of explicit subject metadata in the records of children's material to combat bibliographic invisibility. The application of fluffy terms may ultimately make diverse materials findable by embracing the methodological flexibility of uncontrolled vocabularies without supporting the use of prejudicial or inappropriate terminology. As with drag storytimes themselves, increasing the visibility of books with diverse content by applying explicit subject metadata may inadvertently make such material hypervisible (Kitzie et al. 2022), subjecting them to heightened scrutiny and negative attention. Although members of marginalized groups may be better able to find materials that reflect their identities, it also results in materials becoming findable by those who protest their inclusion in library collections. Individuals and groups who protest diverse material and programs such as drag storytimes may be able to find diverse materials more readily and call for their removal from the collection. This concern is not trivial, given the recent spate of book challenges across the United States that have primarily focused on books with LGBTQIA+ and/or BIPOC characters (Alter and Harris 2022; Stroshane, 2022). Catalogers should balance the desire to make diverse children's material more visible with the potential that doing so may make these materials hypervisible.

Endnotes

1. Here, in line with Williams (2017), we use the term 'fluffy' to indicate subject metadata that is "lacking in meaning or substance" (Merriam-Webster, n. d.).
2. Each of these books has also been identified as having the potential to be read as queer by other scholars and/or conservative groups that challenge the presence of LGBTQIA+ books in schools (Brand and Maasch 2017;

Sullivan and Urraro 2017; Wargo and Coleman 2021; Stroshane 2022).

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