

Just How Open is Open Access? Exposing Problematic Elements in bepress' Digital Commons Discipline Taxonomy for Institutional Repositories Emily Carlisle (University of Western Ontario); Roger Chabot (University of Western Ontario)

Emerging in the late twentieth century, the open access movement served as a response to the serials crisis. The rationale for open access was simple: publicly-funded research ought to be a public good. Thus, institutional repositories (IRs) became one of the engines of this movement. They would collect, preserve, and freely disseminate authors' self-archived works at an institution. IRs were lauded as a means to increase access to scholarly knowledge, equitize knowledge sharing across the global academic community, and resist the corporatization of scholarly communications.

We argue, however, that IRs may not share knowledge as openly as once thought. Inspired by the CFLA's 2017 Truth & Reconciliation Report & Recommendations and efforts at Western Libraries to document metadata representations of works by/about Indigenous peoples, we undertook a project to examine the ways in which Indigenous peoples are represented in Western Libraries' Digital Commons (DC) IR. Our study later grew into a broader investigation of the problematic worldview perpetuated by the DC Three-Tiered Discipline Taxonomy—a taxonomy used to provide subject access to works in DC IRs. Our examination reveals that in our profession's haste to manage the serials crisis, we have failed to properly examine the tools that we use to enact our "open" ideology.

Through four case studies—focused on the disciplinary classification of works by/about Indigenous peoples, religious communities, and racial and ethnic minorities in Western Libraries' IR—we provide evidence of privilege and prejudice embedded in the DC Discipline Taxonomy. Like in other library classification schemes, historically criticized for privileging the Western male-dominated culture of their originators, Anglo-American centrism, imperialism, and racism feature in the DC Taxonomy. With more terminological accuracy given to dominant culture, marginalized groups are literally "othered" into obscurity. Works by/about these groups are thus rendered invisible to web crawlers responding to searches for specific topics. It would seem that DC IRs are working against the ideals of open, equitable knowledge sharing—the very ideals in which open access is rooted.

We conclude, therefore, that as academic librarians, we must confront barriers to diversity, namely the prejudices historically found in our classification systems. Now especially, rather than placing the onus on minority groups to write themselves into existence, academic librarians must leverage the almost limitless digital environment to give space to historically "othered" groups. Only by doing so can IRs be used both to resist capitalism and to further our profession's "open," equitable agenda.