

Truth Talking in The Library: A Thematic Investigation of Statements on Bias in Libraries and Archives

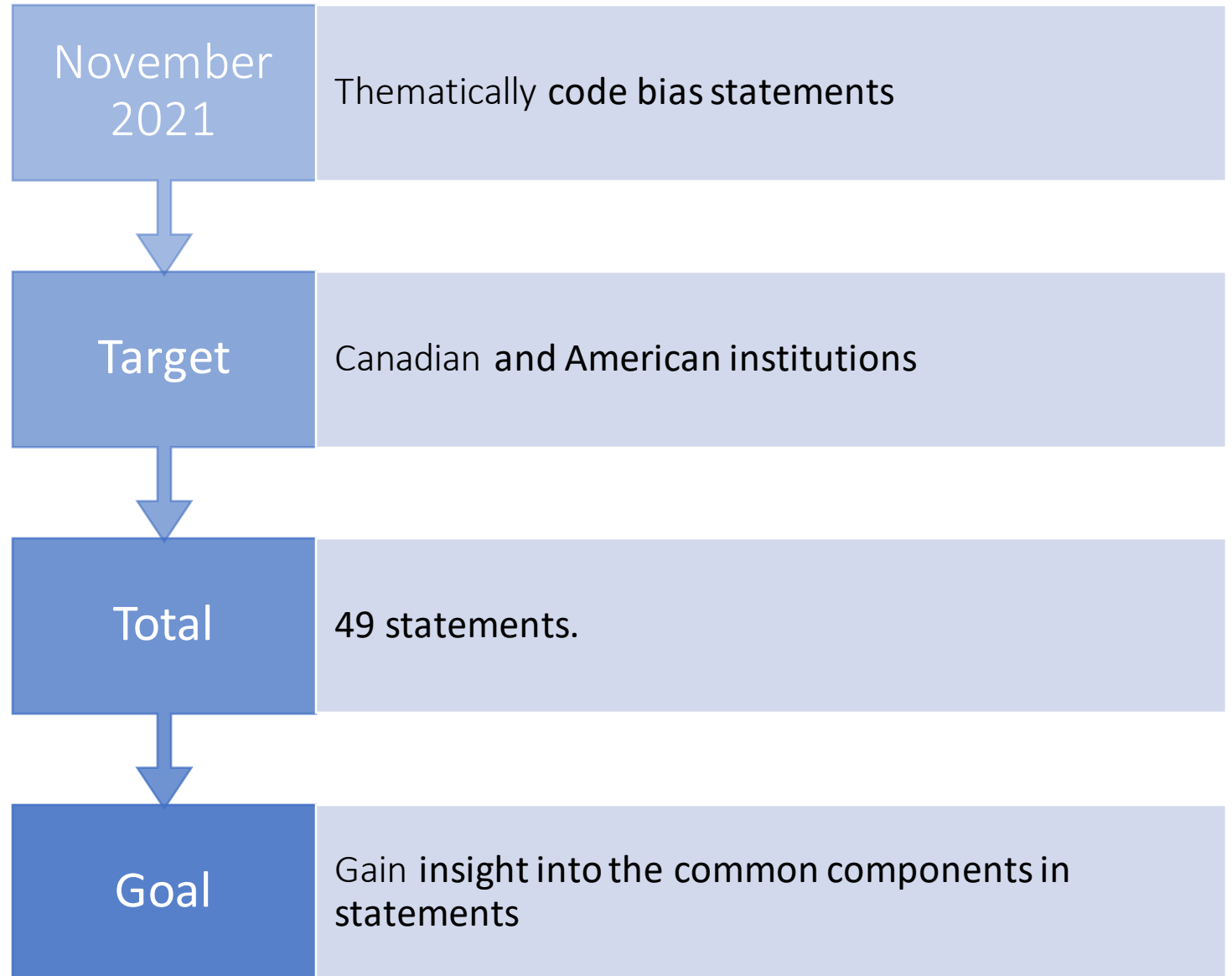
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Statements on Harmful Language

Cora & Tina

Project Overview



Themes



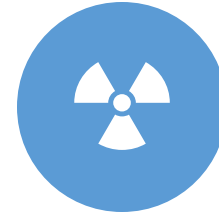
CONTENT WARNING



SUPPLEMENTARY
RESOURCES



PROVENANCE



JUSTIFICATION FOR
HARMFUL CONTENT



INTERSECTIONALITY



CONCRETE ACTION

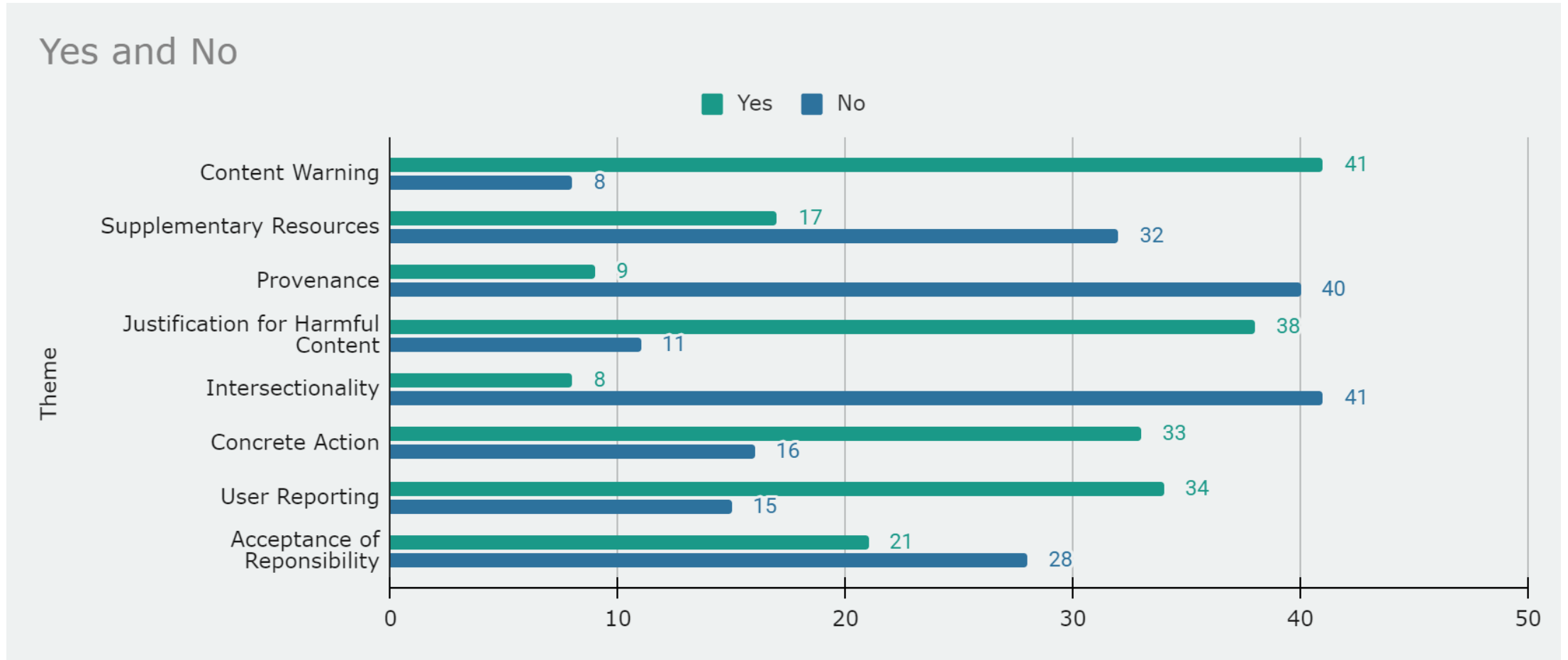


USER REPORTING



ACCEPTANCE OF
RESPONSIBILITY

Summary of Findings



Critical Reflection

Insight into
Institutional Attitudes

Lack of Action

Barriers to Action

Avoidance of
Responsibility

Patron Consultation
and Solicitation

Institutional
Collaboration



Masking Offensive Subject Headings

Jordan

SH Project Overview



Initiating the project and survey

- Investigated what other libraries are doing:
 - **University of Manitoba:** [Changes to Library of Congress Subject Headings Related to Indigenous Peoples: for use in the AMA MAIN Database.](#)
 - **Triangle Research Libraries Network (TRLN):** [List of terms currently being overlaid](#)
 - **SUNY Library Consortia:** [List of terms and project steps](#)
- Sent survey as a way to get buy-in and gauge if there is broad support for this project at the University of Toronto Libraries?

The Survey

Internal Feedback on Problematic Subject Headings

The Indigenous Metadata Working Group is investigating piloting a project to make subject headings more useful for our community by replacing terms that are deemed to be problematic / discriminatory with preferred terms in the Subject Details view in LibrarySearch. In this proposed project, when users search by either the original Library of Congress (or other thesauri) subject, their search will still return all the results for that subject, but when looking at the Subject Details section of the record they will see the preferred term. If they search by the preferred term, they will see all of the same results as if they would have searched by the LC subject, but will also see the preferred term in the Subject Details section of the preferred term, rendering the LC subject invisible to them.

This is a process that has been undertaken by other institutions who use Alma and PrimoVE, such as Harvard, the SUNY consortia, University of Manitoba, Triangle Research Libraries Network (TRLN), and more. If you would like to see examples from these institutions (with screenshots and more details) before completing this survey, please follow this link: <https://connect.library.utoronto.ca/display/CAUG/Example+Subject+Changes+in+LibrarySearch>

Common Questions and Answers:

Q: Can users still search by the original Library of Congress (or other thesauri) subject?

A: Yes, both the old term and the new term will still be indexed for search, it is just in the subject display that users will see the new term.

Q: What if a discriminatory term appears somewhere other than the subjects, for example, in the title?

A: The term would not be changed.

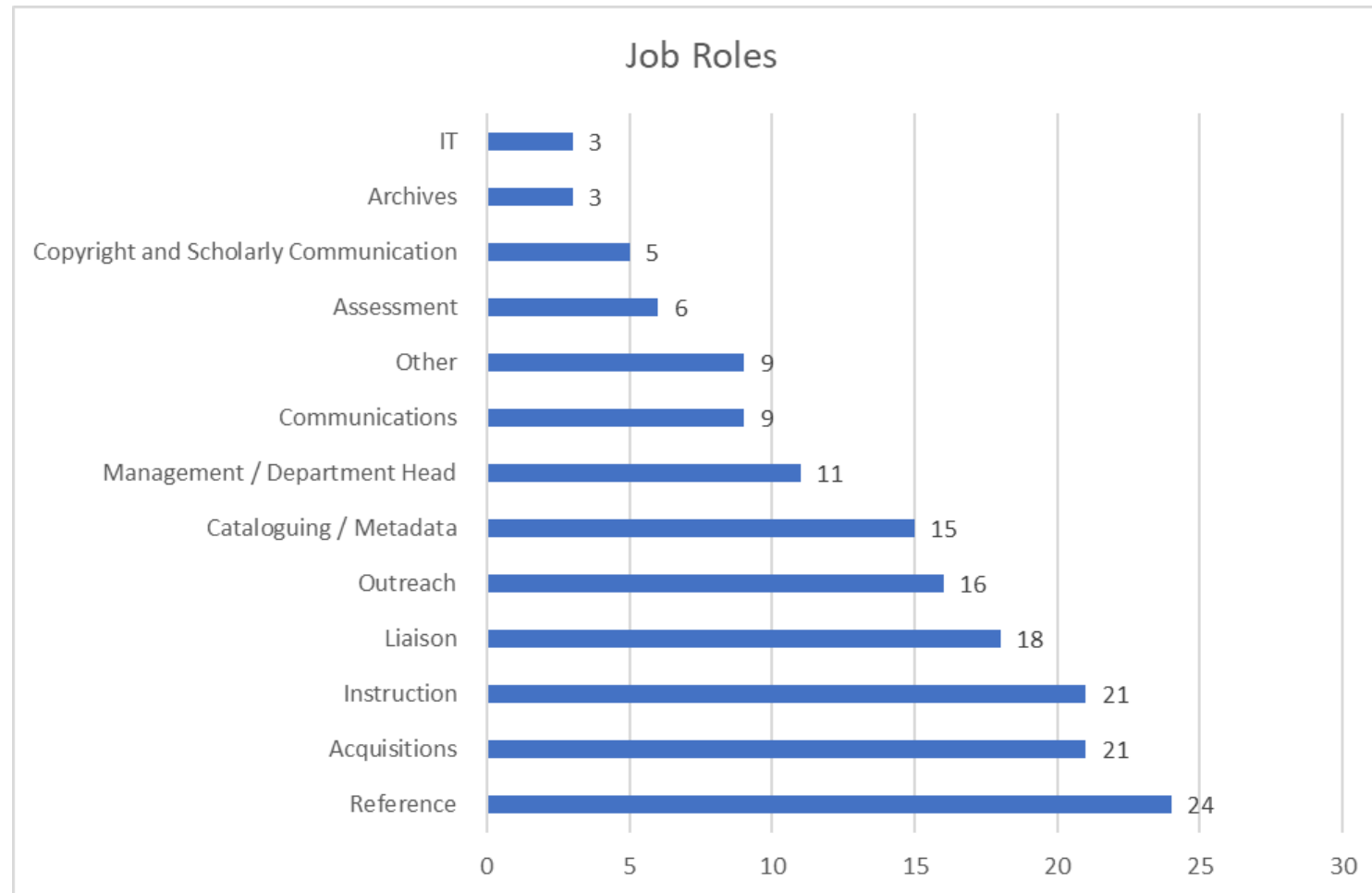
Q: Why can't we just ask Library of Congress (or other thesaurus owners) to change the subject?

A: In the case of some of these terms, changes have been requested, but sometimes Library of Congress makes changes slowly, or they choose not to make changes because of their relationship with the people they serve in the US Congress. One very public example of this is the Change the Subject Project, which you can get a quick

Survey responses

- 37 responses (UTL has 683 staff including students according to the [2020 annual report](#))
- Survey was shared via:
 - Catinfo listserv
 - Collections committee listserv
 - Reference services email (and was presented at ref services on Nov. 10, 2021)
 - Arts Humanities Social Sciences AHSS Liaison Librarian cluster email
 - Library Teaching and Learning Committee email (LTLC)

Q: What roles do you have within the library?
(check all that apply)



Q: Is there anything in our current practices around subject headings (specifically related to discriminatory terms) that impacts your ability to do your job or impacts your choice not to use them? If so, please elaborate.

- 28 responses
 - 1 did not directly answer the question, so following percentages will be out of 27 responses
- Thematically coded results
 - 16 responded yes (59%)
 - 11 responded no (41%)

Feelings of shame or embarrassment

"Over the years it's become increasingly impossible to explain why our catalogue still says "Indians of North America" rather than "First Nations," When teaching information literacy classes, many years ago I used to include an example that contained that heading, and I'd explain how LC subject headings can be outdated and hard to guess. But I stopped doing so out of concern for how the use of this example might affect any Indigenous students in the class."

Feelings of shame or embarrassment

"I find I need to spend time explaining why discriminatory terms are still in use during consultations. I can't speak from a user's perspective, but I suspect it contributes to the library seeming like a less inclusive space (particularly headings related to abilities / mental health / ethnic identities)."

"It's very uncomfortable having to explain to students/faculty, the need to use discriminatory subject headings to ensure all items on a topic are retrieved. I have loved feedback with LOC about this, but understand the process moves slowly."

How does this break down by job roles?

- 21 had both technical and user roles
- 8 had only technical
- 9 had only user

Technical services

- Cataloguing / Metadata
- IT
- Assessment

User services

- Reference
- Instruction
- Liaison
- Outreach
- Communications

Is there a difference in how we feel based on our job roles?

Has user-facing role (30)

- 7/14 responses to this question identified feeling discomfort / shame
- "I am embarrassed to show sometimes very important sources that have the "Indians of North America" subject heading because it's an erroneous and potentially disrespectful term and one that does not occur to contemporary researchers (students , faculty and other researchers) as it has fallen out of disuse."

Does not have user facing role (8)

- 1/7 responses to this question identified something close to discomfort / shame
- "I actually have not had to catalogue materials with questionable headings but would certainly not want to use them."

Next Steps

The Library

- Go live with the masking
- Implement a feedback mechanism
- Determine permanent home for the project
- Evaluate and add new terms to our masking list

The Research Questions

- Is there a connection between having interpersonal interactions and feeling guilt / shame / responsibility ?
- If so, what impact does that have on job roles where we don't interact with people our decisions can harm?
- Are professional ethics documents actually unhelpful by providing an easy out for harmful behaviour?

Conclusion and Q&A

Want to reach out to us later?

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