



Journal of Documentation

Is there nothing outside the tags?: Towards a poststructuralist analysis of social tagging

Helen Murphy Pauline Rafferty

Article information:

To cite this document:

Helen Murphy Pauline Rafferty , (2015), "Is there nothing outside the tags?", Journal of Documentation, Vol. 71 Iss 3 pp. 477 - 502

Permanent link to this document:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JD-02-2013-0026>

Downloaded on: 10 November 2016, At: 20:40 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 64 other documents.

To copy this document: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

The fulltext of this document has been downloaded 592 times since 2015*

Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

(2015), "Taxonomy of literacies", Journal of Documentation, Vol. 71 Iss 3 pp. 456-476 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JD-10-2013-0128>

(2015), "Information literacies of self-identified sadomasochists: an ethnographic case study", Journal of Documentation, Vol. 71 Iss 3 pp. 423-439 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JD-02-2014-0032>

Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:563821 []

For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

Is there nothing outside the tags?

Towards a poststructuralist analysis of social tagging

Helen Murphy

Library, Trinity Hall, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK, and

Pauline Rafferty

Department of Information Studies, Aberystwyth University, Aberystwyth, UK

Poststructuralist
analysis of
social tagging

477

Received 20 February 2013
Revised 28 October 2013
Accepted 2 July 2014

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore relationships between social tagging and key poststructuralist principles; to devise and construct an analytical framework through which key poststructuralist principles are converted into workable research questions and applied to analyse LibraryThing tags, and to assess the validity of performing such an analysis. The research hypothesis is that tagging represents an imperfect analogy for the poststructuralist project.

Design/methodology/approach – Tags from LibraryThing and from a library OPAC were compared and contrasted with Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and publishers' descriptions. Research questions derived from poststructuralism, asked whether tags destabilise meaning, whether and how far the death of the author is expressed in tags, and whether tags deconstruct LCSH.

Findings – Tags can temporarily destabilise meaning by obfuscating the structure of a word. Meaning is destabilised, perhaps only momentarily, and then it is recreated; it might resemble the original meaning, or it may not, however any attempt to make tags useful or functional necessarily imposes some form of structure. The analysis indicates that in tagging, the author, if not dead, is ignored. Authoritative interpretations are not pervasively mimicked in the tags. In relation to LCSH, tagging decentres the dominant view, but neither exposes nor judges it. Nor does tagging achieve the final stage of the deconstructive process, showing the dominant view to be a constructed reality.

Originality/value – This is one of very few studies to have attempted a critical theoretical approach to social tagging. It offers a novel methodological approach to undertaking analysis based on poststructuralist theory.

Keywords Controlled languages, Indexing, Poststructuralism, Tagging

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

Recent studies on tagging share a focus on practical issues: the relationship between tags and information organisation, the quality of user-created metadata, and the generation of structural and linguistic improvement of tags. Few studies have attempted a critical theoretical approach to social tagging. This paper undertakes a poststructuralist assessment of the practice and results of social tagging. Its purpose is to identify the means to and carry out a poststructuralist analysis of social tagging; and to assess the validity of performing such an analysis. Poststructuralism questions the organising principles of language systems, arguing that the distinctions we make are indicative of the symbolising systems and structures around us, and not of the world as it actually exists. It seeks to identify, interrupt and deconstruct these symbolising systems and structures which it perceives as oppressive. Subsequently, poststructuralists champion diversity of interpretation, instability of meaning, and seek to interrogate underlying assumptions (Belsey, 2002, p. 6).



It might be argued that social tagging, especially within a library catalogue, represents an imperfect analogy of a poststructuralist project. Tagging radicalises metadata creation by democratising it, intrinsically offering a critique of the normative symbolising systems and structures used in content analysis, as well as the assumed need for consistency, experience and authority in how items are described. By allowing virtually anyone to contribute, by allowing that contribution to embody practically any linguistic or syntactical form and by not controlling or censoring tag development, tagging can displace the primacy of closed, controlled systems.

Research aims and objectives

The purpose of the research is to explore relationships between social tagging and certain key poststructuralist principles derived from the literature and to explore whether social tagging might be considered a realisation of poststructuralist goals articulated in the literature, by performing an analysis of tags, connected to 40 titles in LibraryThing and the OPAC of a large UK academic library using a poststructuralist-inspired interpretative framework. The selected titles pertain to LGBT history, a choice driven by the potential of this academic area to represent non-dominant views (see Bates and Rowley, 2011, p. 432). There is no generic poststructuralist analysis which can be applied to any phenomena, nor is poststructuralism easily reduced or summarised. Rather, part of the research lies in devising a series of research questions which can be applied to tags or the practice of tagging. These questions are derived from three significant poststructuralist tenets: the destabilisation of meaning, the death of the author, and deconstruction.

The research objectives are to devise and construct an analytical framework through which key poststructuralist principles are converted into workable, verifiable and rigorous research questions which can feasibly be applied to social tagging, and to critically apply these questions to a sample of tags and enquire about the extent to which tagging matches and fulfils poststructuralist goals. It is acknowledged that these objectives lay themselves open to poststructuralist deconstruction, embodying as they do the discourse of an objective, constructivist social science research epistemology. Rather than claiming that this study can undertake poststructuralist analysis, it might be more accurate to argue that the objectives of the study are inspired by poststructuralist theory while its method is actualised within the discourse of social science orientated critical analysis.

We can, following Foucault, situate the article within certain discursive regimes: it is a scholarly paper, a Foucauldian statement, published in a scholarly Information Science journal, and while its worldview embraces poststructuralist theoretical approaches to language and communicative practice, it also attempts to adhere to codes and conventions of social science orientated research, which propels it towards a disciplining and objectifying method that sets up a tension with its poststructuralist leanings. As a material statement, it is open to quotation, critique, circulation, derision as it is read, remembered, and indeed forgotten by material readers. As Radford and Radford note in relation to their article on structuralism and poststructuralism in LIS:

[t]his article/statement has the potential to have a significant impact on the production and appearance of other material statements. It becomes an item in circulation that impacts the statements it comes into contact with. Foucault (1988, pp. 333-334) notes that his statements have the potential to 'land in unexpected places and form shapes that I had never thought of. They are able to do this because statements are real; they have a material existence and, as such, have the potential to physically circulate among readers. The readers, in turn, have the capacity to 'manipulate, use, transform exchange, combine, decompose, and

recompose, and possibly destroy' (Foucault, 1972, p. 105) those statements (Radford and Radford, 2005, p. 71-72). Poststructuralist analysis of social tagging

This paper/statement is itself open to the questioning of its meaning, and necessarily embodies the worldviews, assumptions, ideologies in and through which its authors operate. All claims and statements in this paper, as much as any other article, are contingent, indeed the discussion of poststructuralism within this paper is itself ideologically, historically, philosophically contingent, and open to deconstruction. This is acknowledged, and yet at the same time the literature of postmodern theory, material, contextual, playful and iconoclastic, like all other material statements, offers itself up to manipulation, use and transformation. It is in the spirit of transformative creativity that we attempt to construct an analytical framework from poststructuralist principles.

The poststructuralist principles that underpin this study are.

Destabilisation of meaning

The notion of destabilisation of meaning is central to poststructuralism, which “break[s] up the unities which [a] text appears to project, exposing the ideology which it seeks, surreptitiously, to put across, and destabilising the terms in which it pretends to give a coherent expression of that ideology” (Hughes and Sharrock, 1997, p. 185). Poststructuralism relentlessly questions “ideologies and concepts that appear to be natural, stable and known” (Gormly, 1997, p. 318), and emphasises the fluidity and the ongoing production of meaning (Beasley, 1999). Destabilisation of meaning does not, itself, have a single meaning, rather, there are distinct poststructuralist views about how and why it occurs. Foucault (2002) focuses on the historicist structures which determine and constrain the way that we think and the language that we use. This notion, “archaeology”, shows that language is destabilising because its meaning is not authentic outside its original historical context. Foucault is concerned with the general mode of thinking, or episteme, behind language. The episteme is always historically contingent.

Derrida introduces destabilisation of meaning through the concept of *différance*, based on a pun on the French verbs “to differ” and “to defer” (1974, p. 60f, see also: Derrida 1973, 1978). He argues that the concept which is signified is not present in and of itself, and meaning is always deferred. Just as “difference” is distinguishable from “*différance*” only when it is read, and not heard, so the notion of stable foundation of meaning can be refuted, as well as the primacy of speech over writing. The difficulty is that Derrida “does not present the reader with a finished philosophical system in which each term is defined and located, from first principles to final theory” (Johnson, 1997, p. 6). Poster (1989) writes of the perpetual detour of meaning in Derrida’s approach, and the project of poststructuralism in militating against the “limiting effects of totalising thought” (p. 108). In fighting with the centre of totalising thought, poststructuralism effectively sets out its own centre.

Death of the author

With Barthes’ (1967) “death of the author”, the reader becomes the producer of the text, a conceptual shift which “utterly transforms the modern text” (1977, p. 145). Barthes (1977) contends that: “to give a text an Author [...] is to impose a limit on that text” (p. 147) in assigning a single interpretation to that text. The death of the author is a strong argument in favour of the potential multiplicity of meaning because the reader is the originator of meaning. Moreover, this invokes an intertextuality because in inventing that meaning, the reader is influenced by other texts. Foucault (1984) takes

up a similar issue, asking: “what does it matter who is speaking?” (p. 101). He argues that authorship is incorrectly seen as “solid and fundamental” (p. 103): in fact, the concept of the author function did not always exist, but came into being, and further, it does not “affect all discourses in a universal and constant way” (p. 103).

Deconstruction

At the heart of deconstruction is the questioning of underlying assumptions and structures and their subsequent fundamental destabilisation. Derrida’s deconstruction remains deliberately undefined: “all sentences of the type ‘deconstruction is x’ or ‘deconstruction is not x’ a priori miss the point, which is to say that they are at least false” (Wood and Bernasconi, 1988, p. 4). To define deconstruction would be to make it reducible to an essential feature, and it would subsequently revert to a metaphysical realm of absolute meaning. Derrida recognises the internal contradiction of poststructuralism, but does not manage to or elects not to resolve it.

Derrida’s refusal to impose a meaning on deconstruction is matched by his repudiation that it should be used as a method. Despite this, he tends to use it in that way and scholarship follows him. A typical deconstructive approach is designed by Lather (1991, cited in Olson, 1997): first, identify the binaries or the oppositions that structure an argument; second, reverse or displace the “dependent term” from its negative position to a place that locates it as “the very condition of the positive term” (p. 183); and third, create a more fluid, less coercive conceptual organisation of binary terms which “transcends a binary logic by simultaneously being both and neither of the binary terms” (p. 183). Despite contradicting Derrida’s original intentions, such descriptions of deconstruction as a method are useful in providing a means of understanding its purpose.

Poststructuralism, LIS and social tagging

A typical approach in general studies of social tagging is to focus on its advantages and disadvantages. For Kroski (2005), tagging is inclusive, incorporating no imposed cultural or political bias; its language is current, fluid and capable of incorporating terminology and neologisms; it is non-binary, democratic and self-moderating, follows desire lines (see also Mathes, 2004), engenders community and offers excellent usability. Hammond *et al.* (2005) add its flexibility, while Mathes (2004) underlines the opportunity for serendipitous browsing afforded by the flat structure of folksonomy. Porter (2005) emphasises the importance of tagging in resource discovery. Their “freeform” (Shirky, 2005) and uncontrolled nature means that tags are able to describe authentically an object in fluent, current and flexible language (Kroski, 2007, p. 95). They can be created and applied “on the fly” (Peterson, 2006); they are inclusive, and give equal weight to “long tail” interests (Trant, 2009) and, as such, they are fundamentally disparate from formal or traditional taxonomies which require language stability and control.

Among the disadvantages of social tagging are a lack of synonym and homonym control, a lack of precision and hierarchy, a “basic level” problem where broad and narrow terms are used interchangeably, and susceptibility to unethical gaming (Kroski, 2005). Their uncontrolled nature has led to charges of imprecision, inexactness and ambiguity (Guy and Tonkin, 2006, Rafferty and Hilderley, 2007), undermining or disabling their expediency in information retrieval or for universal application. The lack of control (Guy and Tonkin, 2006; Kroski, 2007) and opportunities for over-personalisation create the potential for chaos and unpredictability. Despite this, Guy and Tonkin (2006) conclude

that the benefits of tagging outweigh the costs and promote investment in ways of improving tags, both at a systems level (tidying tags, or tag bundles) and user level (tag literacy). The inevitability of tagging is readily evident in Kroski (2005), Quintarelli (2005), and Shirky (2005).

Given such assessments, the inclusion of tags within OPACs appears incongruous with the main purpose of the catalogue. However, the value of tagging in both increasing and diversifying metadata means that it is often seen as a supplement to extant controlled classification or categorisation schemes. Moreover, applications like LibraryThing for Libraries (LTfL) permit OPACs to extract and import tags applied by LibraryThing users and embed them into records. The tags are indexed, searchable and provide alternative routes for resource discovery through tag clouds or bundles. This functionality works with the majority of library management systems (LMS) providers and many, including MyDiscoveries with Aquabrowser, provide the opportunity for OPAC users to add their own tags to the list. Bates and Rowley (2011) assess the potential of social tagging in engendering neutrality and inclusivity in public libraries. Beginning with the assumption that LCSH entail a cultural and political bias necessitated by stability, they evaluate how the natural language in tags can overcome these biases and thus represent a more authentic and more inclusive “lifeworld” (p. 434). However, they identify that folkonomies are able to develop their own biases, and emerge from a particular socio-cultural background of their own.

Few studies propose direct links between poststructuralism and LIS. None have specifically brought their analysis to bear on social tagging, and the commentaries, as a whole, are rather fragmented (Christensen, 2010; Olsson, 2010; Frohmann, 1994; Radford and Radford, 2005). Olson (1997) uses Derridean deconstruction to argue against the necessity of imposing a universal language in classification schemes because deconstruction reveals that the uniformity intrinsic to such schemes is exclusionary. Deodato (2010) argues that by creating space for the Other, deconstruction reveals the bias in closed systems. Like Olson, he identifies the underlying moralistic focus where librarians perpetuate a discourse which is dominant and perhaps oppressive, arguing that social tagging represents a relinquishment of librarian control in allowing “users – especially marginalised users – to create their own structures of knowledge” (p. 86).

Methodology

Poststructuralism might seem to contest the assumptions which inform our basic understanding of research, indeed arguably poststructuralism seeks to undermine this process. On the other hand, it might be argued that the philosophical perspective opened up by a poststructuralist focus on signs operating within contexts could provide a benchmark for data treatment, establishing the equal validity and legitimacy of each tag, challenging the perspective that tags need to be representative of anything other than themselves. Such a perspective promotes cognisance of the power structures at play in tag assignation, and encourages the identification and active discarding of personal biases. A poststructuralist approach also underlines the inevitably incomplete nature of this study, acknowledging that all research is ongoing, contextual, contingent and progressive.

Tags used in this study were mainly derived from LibraryThing, which in early 2012, had over 80 million tags for nearly 70 million books (LibraryThing, 2012), ensuring the richness of its data. Its importance is recognised in other research studies

(cf. Bates and Rowley, 2011; Lu *et al.*, 2010; Rolla, 2009; Smith, 2007). Catalogue records were obtained from one OPAC, Catalogue A. The LCSH were taken from records in the Library of Congress catalogue and, on the three occasions that the title was not present here, they were extracted from WorldCat. The relationship between the Library of Congress and LCSH justifies its selection, and WorldCat was considered an equally reputable source. An online bibliography of LGBT history was selected as the source of titles (Norton, 2008). A simple random sampling approach ensured that the title, or an edition of that title, should be present in both LibraryThing and Catalogue A, and should have at least one tag attached to it in both locations. Non-fiction titles were chosen being more appropriate for the holdings of Library A. In addition, tagging of fiction and non-fiction has different emphases (Granström, 2007). In all, 40 titles published between 1993 and 2010 were chosen.

Greenblatt (1990, 2010) and Capek (1987) argue that the way LGBT resources are treated in LCSH incurs the problem of implied judgment. Society and culture inform LCSH, but the stability and dominance of LCSH perpetuates and prolongs society's biases. Olson (2007) offers an exceptional feminist critique of these issues, arguing that the logic underlying LCSH is fundamentally gendered leading to a marginalisation of the unconventional (Olson, 1997); the dominant view, by virtue of its inclusion, is normalised, propagated and endorsed. This marginalisation and exclusion undermines one of the ethical goals of librarianship: universal access (Olson, 2000). Herein lies the justification for the selection of LGBT history as the focus of the titles used in this study: the potentially heteronormative biases of LCSH emphasise any expression of Other views among the tags.

Titles were sorted into alphabetical order by author (removing any extant bias from their organisation on the original site) and numbered. Tags listed in each record in LibraryThing and Catalogue A were imported and duplicated tags were deleted so that each tag was listed only once. These tags were placed under each respective title. Subject headings were extracted from Library of Congress (or WorldCat) and placed beneath the tags. Publishers' web sites, Amazon, and Google Books were used to find the publishers' descriptions. To ensure accuracy, the same description should appear in at least two of these locations. This was not possible on two occasions, and a local copy of the title was accessed for verification.

The relevance of the "power law" (cf. Mathes, 2004, Kipp and Campbell, 2006), and the notion that regular employment of a tag is generally attached to an assumption of its accuracy or authority (Spalding, 2007), implied that each tag should be counted only once to eliminate any potential bias with regard to accuracy. Poststructuralism would propound the equal validity and legitimacy of multiple views, regardless of popularity. Consequently, any assessment of tags which questioned their accuracy would impose and assume a preordained notion of what is accurate, and carries the danger that this "correct" interpretation becomes a dominant perspective.

This presumption of a dominant perspective from tag frequency, however, exists only with reference to the tags attached to a single record. Tag frequency, when assessed across the 40 records, is less a question of accuracy than one of the nature and employment of language in tags *per se*. Frequently used words or combinations of words indicate particular perspectives without being tied to a judgment of their appropriateness in any specific context. This led to a terminological distinction being drawn between the use of "tag" and "term" in the analysis. "Tag" is taken to mean a word or phrase in a single record, while "term" implies its use across the 40 records. Therefore there are 2,407 tags in this collection, among which there are 1,247 terms.

Given the large quantity of data, content analysis, in the form of coding, was used. In line with the theoretical approach, the objectivity of content analysis seemed particularly apt. However, content analysis is criticised for its inability to answer the question “why?”, and this difficulty was overcome by the adoption of a qualitative approach both in the formation of research questions through document analysis, and in the subsequent analysis of the results. Content analysis provided a clear structure for dealing with the breadth and number of tags and managing the complexity of the research questions. It could also bridge the gap between the quantitative and qualitative sides of the research in order to generate basic results and then to extrapolate any themes and conclusions from them.

A full review of the tags was conducted to gain a sense of their nature, content and purpose. A record with an average number of tags was selected for a pilot coding exercise to determine the codes required. This showed that a basic coding system would suffice, with secondary categories for further narrowing. Existing approaches to coding were examined (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2009), but the tags were deemed too volatile to be appropriated to these structures. Table I delineates the codes selected. A broad main code is applied to each tag, and is followed where relevant by a secondary code.

Content description was applied to tags which were loosely seen to describe the subject matter of the book (i.e. “sociology”, “aesthetics”). The subject matter of the texts roughly dictated that the secondary tags should be LGBT and history. Book description was used for tags which physically described the book. This was subdivided into descriptors of its format (“illustrated”, “paperback”). Additional description was used for tags which were proper nouns, such as names of people or places, and also for simple dates, such as “1980s”. Finally, unstable tags were coded. This category was further divided into personal tags (such as “wishlist” or “to read”) and tags which were unclear to the point that their nature, content or purpose were indeterminable. The coding system used is not designed to be universally applicable but is idiosyncratic to this study and its research questions, which are:

RQ1. Do tags destabilise meaning? This entailed a quantitative analysis of tag and term frequency across records, followed by a more qualitative and in-depth assessment of the location of destabilisation. This research question dealt mainly with tags coded as LGBT, which narrowed the sample but provided a coherent collection of tags for analysis.

RQ2. How far is the “death of the author” expressed in tags? The first part of this question required a quantitative analysis of tags coded as title and publisher description (PD), comparing them to whole tag collection. The detailed nature of the application of these codes meant that they were allocated after a second review of the tags. Second, tags coded as personal were examined in relation to the full collection.

Primary code	Secondary codes		
Content description	History	LGBT	
Book description	Format	Title	Publishers' description
Additional description	People	Place	Date(s)
Unstable	Personal	Unclear	

Table I.
Outline of coding
system used to
organise tags

RQ3. Do tags deconstruct LCSH? This required an additional coding system to assess the LCSH in each record, and the first part of the analysis used this coding scheme, which was devised using the same process as previous codes. Though the categories in the second system were simpler, their allocation was more complex as they were not strictly binary. Each subject heading was allocated a score based simply on its number of subdivisions (four subdivisions received a score of 4), and each subdivision was then assessed with the codes and scored accordingly. The code score could never be higher than the number of subdivisions, but more than one code could be attributed to any subject heading. The objective of this scheme was to analyse each part of the subject heading while permitting it to retain its structure and format. Table II outlines the codes employed.

A score was assigned to each record, composed of the number of subdivisions in the headings per record: the subject heading “Gay men | Africa | Social conditions” would receive a score of 3. The total scores for each record were calculated and recorded. Each code (CCLC, CCLD, CDLD) was then applied to each heading and subdivision. If the code was applicable in any way, and even if it was applicable in more than one way, it received a single point. The codes were not mutually exclusive, and the score per code could only ever match the total score given to a heading.

For example, Record 22, which has two headings, received perfect scores for each code:
Transvestites
Transvestism

Each heading has one component, so the record has a score of 2. Both terms are present in tags, so the CCLC score is 2, and direct synonyms (“cross-dressers” and “cross-dressing”) are both present, so the CCLD score is 2. Other tags connect transvestism to “gender-bending”, pointing to transgenderism, awarding a CDLD score of 2. This analysis was performed on each record, with the results being placed into a Table III.

Table II.
Outline of coding system used to analyse LCSH

Code	Meaning	Example
CCLC	Conceptual and linguistic convergence – words or phrases in subdivisions are directly repeated in the tag list	LCSH: “Homosexuality” Tag: “homosexuality”
CCLD	Conceptual convergence and linguistic divergence – synonyms for the words or phrases of the subdivisions appear as tags, with little to no change in meaning	LCSH: “Motion pictures” Tag: “film”
CDLD	Conceptual and linguistic divergence – rough synonyms for the words or phrases of the subdivisions appear as tags, but change, expand or narrow their emphasis so that the words cannot be used directly interchangeably NB: This code signified deconstruction	LCSH: “Lesbian” Tag: “LGBT”

Table III.
Results of LCSH deconstruction analysis for record 22

Heading	Units	CCLC	CCLD	CDLD
1	1	1	1	1
2	1	1	1	1
	2	2	2	2
		100	100	100

This research question also demanded that the structure of LCSH was assessed. This required a more qualitative approach, which treated both tags and LCSH as text.

It is acknowledged that there was potential subjectivity in the application of codes and in the analysis of codes. This study retains a reflexive self-consciousness about the contingency of all knowledge and all research practice.

Poststructuralist
analysis of
social tagging

Results and discussion

RQ1: Do tags destabilise meaning?

Destabilisation is not a binary concept but a process of radicalisation and interruption of meaning. When we refer to meaning in this context we are really referring to the interaction between reader and text. Within a poststructuralist framework we would argue that texts do not in and of themselves possess meaning, but that meaning comes through the reading process, and as a result of this, meaning, or perhaps more specifically, interpretation is created or constructed with every reading, even by the same reader at different times. Destabilisation of meaning presupposes that an absolute, or at least dominant meaning, exists, which would be, in the poststructuralist mindset, referential, static and subordinated to and generative of a structure. Moving off from these observations, the subsequent analysis broke into two related questions: does destabilisation occur and, if so, how?

Analysing whether destabilisation occurs entailed assessing the variety and distribution of tags present, as well as the uniqueness and frequency of tag use across the records. Second, locations of destabilisation were explored. Given the need for detailed analysis, only tags coded with LGBT were employed; they formed a manageable but cohesive collection, representing a potential diversity of worldviews. In all, 2,407 individual tags were harvested from the 40 records in both sources; the average number of tags in a record is 60.2, and the number of tags varies from 11 to 210. The majority of records (65 per cent) had fewer than 50 tags attached. Figure 1 demonstrates the distribution of tags across the records, and Figure 2 indicates the variation in tag numbers.

This level of variation might be predicted: the sampling process made no judgment about the reputation or popularity of the titles and subsequently some authors and works are better known than others.

If we assume a tag represents a “meaning” (Christensen, 2010, p. 19), then the number of tags attached would, therefore, suggest a diversity of meanings, undermining the supposition that there is a single meaning. Destabilisation of meaning appears to be readily evident, therefore, and the processional nature of tagging infers that meaning

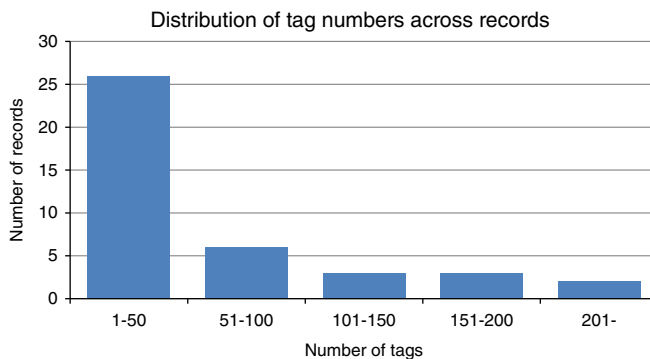
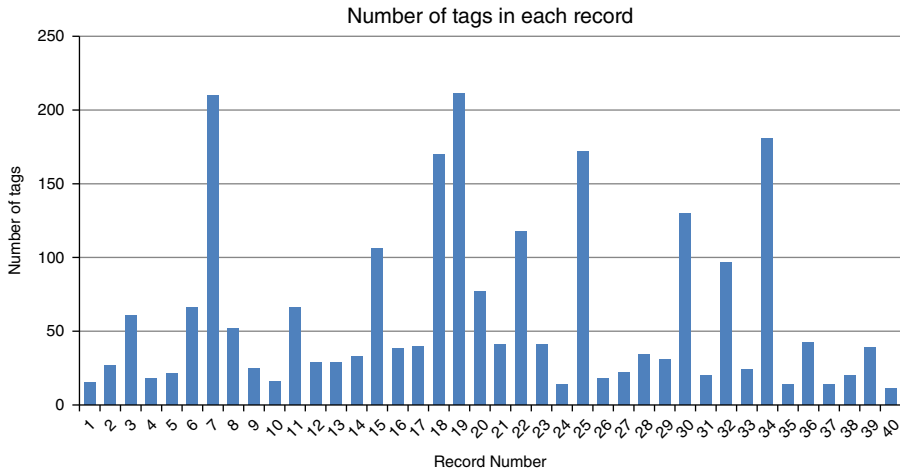


Figure 1.
Histogram showing
distribution of total
numbers of tags
across the records

JDOC
71,3

486

Figure 2.
Histogram
demonstrating
variation in tag
numbers in each
record

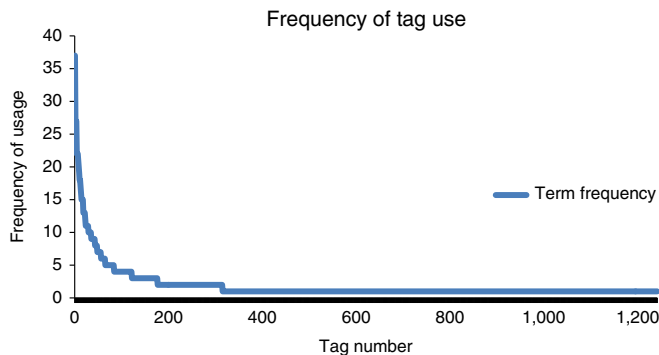


will continue to be destabilised as more tags continue to be added by users. Two further observations evince this finding. First, Table III which shows the numerical results of the first coding scheme, depicting the widespread distribution of tags across each category, reveals a trend towards content description, with content-based tags comprising 58.7 per cent of the total number. However, the tags which describe each book in other ways would suggest that what we understand or assume about meaning is itself destabilised. Meaning is neither straightforward, nor simply confined to the book's content or an assessment of aboutness (see also Bates and Rowley, 2011, p. 435). Rather, what might be considered to constitute "meaning" is extended in the tag list.

Second, there were 1,247 terms across the 40 records; 30 terms appeared in nine or more records, and ten in at least half. The results represented a power law scenario (see Figure 3), with 930 tags, or 74.5 per cent appearing just once. The extent of unique terms implies that meaning is again destabilised because it represents significant terminological variation.

However, the amount of tag repetition and convergence would suggest that while tagging permits a variety of meanings to be attached to a title, it is not protected from the structures at play. We may consider the most frequently appearing terms as dominant. These include "history" (present in 37 records), "gay" (27), "non-fiction" (27), "sexuality" (27), "GLBT" (22), "LGBT" (22) and "queer" (22). While not necessarily

Figure 3.
Line graph depicting
frequency of
tag usage,
demonstrating a
power law scenario



referential preordained notions of accuracy, this level of terminological convergence suggests an intrinsic referentiality to the conventions which guide how we construct meaning and use language to express it. Tagging is not, therefore, strictly immune to the kind of arbitrary and institutional structures which poststructuralism seeks to expose (cf. Derrida, 1976, p. 6, p. 44f).

To identify more closely where destabilisation was located, a textual analysis of the terms coded with LGBT was conducted. There were 305 LGBT terms, making up 778 tags. Broadly speaking, they followed the same power law scenario shown in Figure 3: 206 tags appeared once (32.3 per cent of the total tag sample), and 99 terms more than once (24.5 per cent of the total term sample). Three locations of the destabilisation of meaning were identified.

Basic level terms. Tag analysis revealed so-called “basic level” terms which were not only high frequency tags but were the most popular representations of a specific concept, including “gay”, “LGBT”, and “lesbian”, and which could therefore be considered dominant. It may be argued that the direct and indirect synonyms which appear alongside them, and provide a greater degree of specificity or granularity, undermine the stable meaning of the dominant term by revealing its limitations. The number of associated terms attached to dominant words varies considerably, and quantification is obfuscated by limited demarcation between these terms, and exacerbated by the chaotic nature of tags. The term “lesbian” appears fifteen times, and its content is represented in nine other ways which treat the term both as noun and adjective, unbalancing “lesbian” in a grammatical sense. More importantly, they increase the granularity of the dominant term. While the *OED* defines lesbian simply as “a homosexual woman” (*Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, 2011), the tag “butch” represents a “specific type of lesbian identity which involves a rejection of conventional femininity and an adoption of “masculine” roles” (Stewart, 1995, p. 37). Its counterpart, “femme” is also present in the tags, while their combination, as in “butch-femme” and “fem-but”, underlines the veracity of the perception of this kind of relationship. Another tag, “kiki”, represents a lesbian woman who did not “take on a butch/femme role” (Stewart, 1995, p. 138). Tags are capable of broadening concepts and undermining the meaning of the basic level term. They reveal how it might feasibly be interpreted and disclose its limitations by recognising and attending to these alternative interpretations.

Socio-historic contingency. Tags destabilise meaning in revealing the “modes of thought of our ancestors” (Gutting, 2005, p. 41). Many terms for “lesbian”, for example, emerged from and are representative of a specific socio-historical context, and perhaps importantly, a time of oppression for lesbian women. “Kiki” was common in 1950s America, but is not often in circulation today, while “butch-femme” was not used in Britain until the 1950s, and came under attack in the 1970s and 1980s (Hamer, 1996, p. 149). The terms are not only more specific, but they are indicative of an episteme.

In detaching words from their original context, and placing them in tag lists, tags begin to function as a “statement” (Foucault, 2002, p. 37f). Tags destabilise meaning by decontextualising, and then recontextualising, the term; they gain relevance and meaning from the new discursive framework in which they appear, and in relationship to the other terms in that framework. It might be argued that the term “kiki” in this particular context is generative of more knowledge than the word in isolation, and generative of different knowledge than it was in its original context.

The discursive framework may also restabilise meaning. “Gay” is commonly used to refer to homosexuality *per se*, or homosexual men, but is also used to imply “happy”,

and in more modern parlance, “unfortunate” (*OED*, 2011). The framework restabilises meaning by enabling us to infer the intention of its user, and therefore its specific meaning, in this context. Importantly, though, the word has still undergone a change – this restabilisation is not a simple reversal of the initial destabilising process, but further evidence for it.

Episteme of the tagger. The third location of destabilisation concerns the episteme of the tagger, produced by the structures around him. The amalgamation of tags directly undermines those structures by relegating and ignoring them, and by detaching the use of a word from the episteme of its users. This can play out in terms of restabilisation, as illustrated above by the word “gay”: the use of the word to mean something other than “homosexual” may reflect the episteme of the tagger, but that is lost as it is amalgamated into the discursive framework. Destabilisation also appears in terms of a Foucauldian reverse discourse (Foucault, 1979, p. 101). The term “queen”, for example, is polysemous in such a way that is fundamentally dependent on episteme. On one side, it is a slang term for gay men “often used self-referentially” (Stewart, 1995, p. 205), and yet it “is always perceived as bearing a hostile charge” when used by outsiders (Dynes, 1990, p. 1090). This kind of discourse reflects a structure, but by merging the two epistemes, tagging is able to undermine it, and the meaning contained within it.

Tagging permits an endless possibility of attributing meanings and, importantly, detaches those from their source in the process, thus limiting the grasp of the structures at play in their formation. Tags destabilise meaning by obfuscating the structure of a word (i.e. the episteme which contributes to its employment); they then restabilise that word in a different context or framework. Meaning is destabilised, but perhaps only momentarily, and then it is recreated; it might resemble the original meaning, or it may not. This process is continual: each tag applied entails the possibility of disrupting meaning. In this way, it seems to fulfil Derrida’s contention that meaning is always finite and always deferred (Derrida, 1976, p. 60). At this theoretical level, tags appear to be protected from the structures at play to an extent, however, at this level, tag utility is fundamentally reduced. Any attempt to make tags useful or functional necessarily imposes some form of structure. This might exist in the process of indexing them, organising them in bundles or clouds, or by presenting them so as to reveal their folksonomic structure, emphasising the most popularly applied tags. As tags fulfil their potential for data management and retrieval, they cease to conform to the poststructuralist project.

RQ2: How far is the “death of the author” expressed in tags?

Assessing the “death of the author”, and the “birth of the reader”, requires a broad interpretation of the author as a source of authority or the creator of meaning. For Barthes (1977), the concept of an Author imposed a single meaning on a text (p. 145), limiting the reader’s freedom to create and engender his own meaning. Identifying a tangible location of authored meaning in a text required an adjustment from the idea of the specific Author in the direction of the role that the Author is perceived to hold. For Barthes (1977), this was the expression of meaning from an authoritative perspective (p. 145), and both the title and publishers’ description were seen to embody this.

The analysis consists of a comparison of the tags attached to a record with the words and phrases in the title and publishers’ description of the book to which the record refers. This was seen to be a stable, objective approach, although arguably reductionist. The second part of the analysis dealt with the “birth of the reader”. Though it may be argued that the process of tagging epitomises the birth of the reader,

a more tangible approach was presented by the tags coded as “personal”. This assesses how far readers assimilate books into their own worldview. It is less about assigning meaning than about assigning a space for the text.

“Title” and “PD” (publishers’ description) codes were added to tags. There were 335 title words in the 40 records. The “title” code was applied to 93 (approximately 27.4 per cent) words. The 93 title tags were made up of 15 terms which appeared more than once, and 42 which occurred once. At least one title word was included in 36 records, and four repeated five or more words from the title. On average, each record included 2.3 “title tags”. There was no discernible pattern between the length of the title and the number of tags repeated, and the percentage of title words which appear as tags vary from 8.3 to 100 per cent. The distribution of title tags across the records is shown in Figure 4.

The syntactical requirements of tags and titles differ, however, in that titles include conjunctions, prepositions and articles. Removing these from the titles raised the percentage of title words in the tags from 27.4 to 40.8 per cent. The 93 title tags represent only 3.8 per cent of the total collection of tags, and the 57 terms are 4.5 per cent of the total collection of terms. This suggests that while it is not uncommon for there to be consistency between title words and tags, it is far more likely that tags do not mimic the title. One difficulty with verifying this analysis is that it may simply be coincidence rather than an intentional copying of title words. One way to roughly assess this is to compare the content of the title tags to the tag list as a whole. The results, shown in Figure 5, depict a relatively high level of convergence between the most frequent title tags and the most frequent tags.

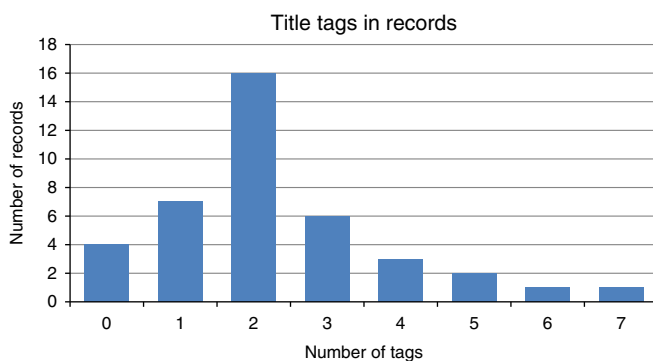


Figure 4.
Histogram
demonstrating the
number of records
with a given number
of title tags

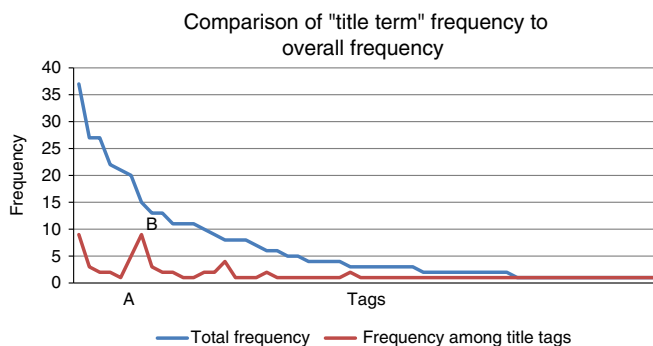


Figure 5.
Line graph showing
the relationship
between the
frequency of each
title tag with its
overall frequency
across all tags

The graph shows only two particularly noticeable points of divergence, both marked above: A is “gender”, which appears 21 times in total, but only once among title tags (though it only appears once in the titles themselves). B represents “lesbian”, which appears 15 times in total, and nine times among the title tags. Each time “lesbian” appears in a title, it is also used as a tag. This may simply demonstrate the commonality of the term, rather than the influence of the author. The preceding analysis would suggest that it is not normative for taggers to simply copy the title of the book provided by the author. There is some overlap, but even the author’s influence over the usage of overlapping terms remains inconclusive. The author, therefore, does not appear to have guided how texts and their meanings are interpreted by taggers.

The same method for analysing title terms was applied to PDs. One of the 40 books did not have a blurb and was excluded from the analysis. The PDs, combined, formed 5,201 words, of which 151 (2.9 per cent) were repeated in the tag list. There were, on average, 3.9 PD tags per record, and 38 of the records included at least one PD tag. The 151 tags included 15 terms which were employed more than once, and 84 unique terms. The percentage of PD words which appeared as tags varied considerably, from just under 1 to 21.4 per cent. The level of variation is shown in Figure 6.

A recalculation after the removal of conjunctions, prepositions and articles in PDs raised the percentage of words which appeared in PDs and also appeared as tags from 2.9 to 4.1 per cent. The number of PD tags were compared with the total tag number. The 151 tags represented 6.2 per cent of the total number of tags; and the 99 terms among them were 7.9 per cent of the total number of terms. Both are fairly insignificant percentages in a data collection of this size. The possibility of overlapping terms being merely coincidental was again considered, and the frequency of PD tags compared to their overall frequency was assessed. The results are shown in Figure 7.

There is more variation here than in the title tag analysis. D and E, marked above, represent “gay history” and “history of sexuality”, both appear just once in the PD tags, but 19 and 16 times respectively in total. C, representing “queer”, is an even more marked divergence. It appears once in the PD tags, and 22 times in total. Further, as it appears in 11 PDs, its overall usage would suggest that “queer” is more likely to be used when it is not provided by the author or publisher. The popularity of the term might be inferred from this.

PDs regularly offer readymade tags which list key topics in a book. Record 2, for example, begins with “Dyke, queer, diesel, butch, femme, zami, drag king, lesbian feminist, kusk, Sapphic”, while Record 11 starts with “Drawing on religion, mythology, anthropology, history and the arts”. It is very rare that these terms are repeated among

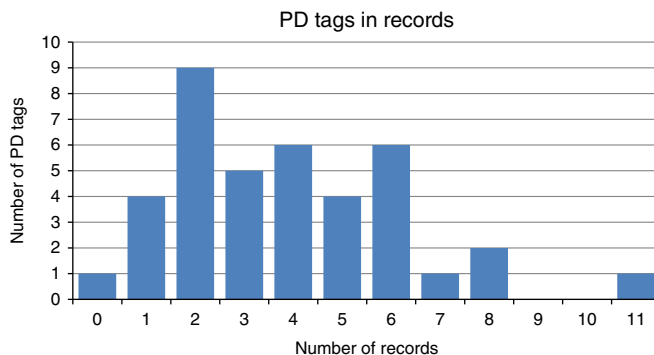


Figure 6. Histogram demonstrating the number of records with a given number of PD tags

the tags, suggesting again that tagging does not simply consist in copying the information provided. Rather, it indicates that tagging consists in a personal interpretation of the text, and how this is realised is taken up in the following section.

Studies of tagging sometimes perceive personal tags negatively (e.g. Guy and Tonkin, 2006). However, personal tags may also be seen to indicate the specific worldview of the individual tagger and their assimilation of a text into that worldview. They represent no objective viewpoint and often make sense only to the tagger. In all, 217 tags were coded “personal” (just over 9 per cent of the total number of tags). They incorporated 116 terms (approximately 9.3 per cent). Some tags appear frequently: “wishlist” (15 times), “unread” (13) and “read” (10) are most popular. Personal tags appear in each of the 40 records. They are prescriptive (“to read”), diarist (“have read”), behavioural and varied, and while they represent only a small percentage of the total number of tags, they are a powerful part of the collection. They rarely discuss content nor do they describe the book’s format. Though the “birth of the reader” is difficult to quantify, the presence of personal tags bear witness to the reader’s assumption that his experience of and relationship with the text is valid.

The analysis indicates that the author, if not dead, is ignored. What may be deemed “authoritative” interpretations are not pervasively mimicked in the tags. Tagging therefore converges with poststructuralist aims, though its realisation is far more aligned to a Foucauldian authorial disappearance than that purported by Barthes. Foucault (1984, p. 103) aimed to reduce the author to a function, existing as one of the many structures which poststructuralism seeks to invade. This seems to be played out, to an extent, in the tags. Further, the authorial interpretation is amalgamated into the tags’ discursive framework, and its source is lost. Finally, part of that framework strongly reflects the birth of the reader, in the form of personal tags.

Tagging, however, omits a vital element in the author’s demise: intention. Tags are freed from authorial structures but they neither expose nor comment upon those structures. The act of tagging is still an act of *écriture*. While it may be that the birth of the reader is actually the birth of many authors who exist in a framework of authorship, there is another overarching Author at play in the way that tags are presented and organised. Authorship is reduced to a structure, and the tagging system, in the form of folksonomies, tag bundles and tag clouds, becomes the new Author. In this way, tagging appears to bear witness to Foucault’s contention that authorship can adapt as it remains susceptible to structures (1984, p. 102). As with *RQI*, however,

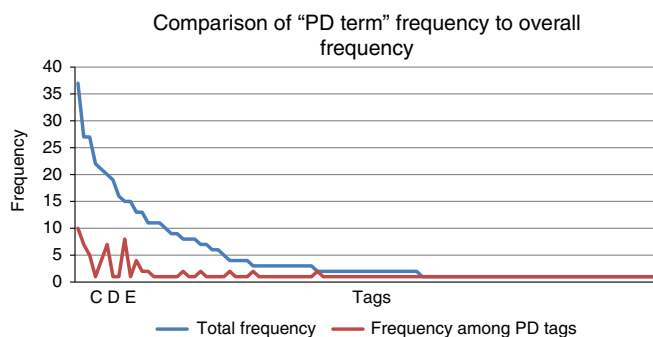


Figure 7.
Line graph showing
the relationship
between the
frequency of each
PD tag with its
overall frequency
across all tags

it also seems that the point at which tagging becomes useful is also the point at which it ceases to conform to the poststructuralist project.

RQ3: Do tags deconstruct LCSH? Assessing whether tags deconstruct LCSH requires recognition of the fact that deconstruction was never intended as a method (Norris, 1987, p. 18). Rather, the interpretation of deconstruction that informs this research question focused on its purpose: the breaking down of binaries and the creation of space for the Other (Olson, 1997, p. 183). This entailed a close reading of the LCSH in each record and an understanding of tags as statement, rather than individual words. The deconstruction of LCSH was divided into two. First, the coding system outlined in the methodology (Table II) was used to assess the deconstruction of LCSH content. The headings coded as CDLD were used to analyse whether deconstruction occurred, recognising that tagging could potentially incorporate both dominant and Other perspectives. Second, the deconstruction of LCSH structure was explored. An examination of whether the uniform heading or its subdivisions were more prominently represented among tags was performed.

There were 174 LCSH across the 40 records. Each record had between 1 and 11 headings, with 4.4 LCSH on average per record. Figure 8 shows the distribution of subject headings across the records, revealing the trend towards a smaller number of subject headings.

Ten full headings appear more than once, and 146 just once, revealing a higher degree of divergence among the tags. Table IV lists the LCSH which appeared most frequently (Table V).

A higher level of consistency among the main headings was found: 58 appear once, and 25 headings more than once. The tendency among the headings is to structure the

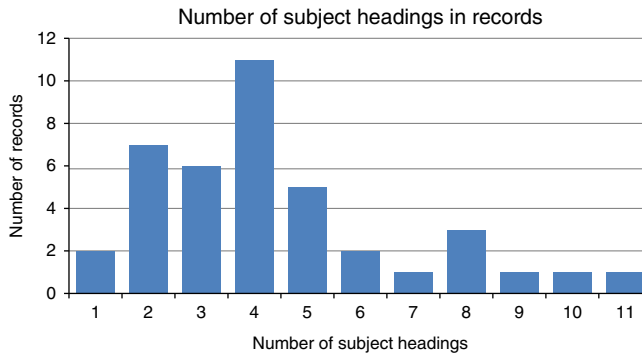


Figure 8. Histogram showing the number of records with a given number of LCSH

Table IV. Results of coding analysis with reference to total numbers of main code assignments (excluding title and PD codes)

Primary code	Secondary codes		
Content description: 1412	History: 286	LGBT: 778	
Book description: 155	Format: 81		
Additional description: 350	People: 116	Place: 155	Date(s): 72
Unstable: 490	Personal: 217	Unclear: 162	

subject so that the “sexuality” element is listed first, and is then qualified by subdivisions. In the list of the most popular uniform headings below, only “English literature” does not in some way reference sexuality (Table VI).

The correlation between the number of tags and LCSH in each record is displayed in Figure 9. The line of best fit demonstrates some positive correlation between the number of tags and headings, but there are significant anomalies. This is an important

Poststructuralist
analysis of
social tagging

Subject heading	Number of times it appears
Lesbians in literature	6
Homosexuality History	4
Gay men in literature	3
Lesbianism in literature	3
English literature Nineteenth century History and Criticism	2
English literature Early modern, 1500-1700 History and criticism	2
Gender identity	2
Lesbians Identity	2
Male homosexuality History	2
Women in literature	2

Table V.
Most frequently
occurring complete
subject headings

Uniform heading	Number of times it appears
Homosexuality	19
Lesbianism	11
English literature	10
Male homosexuality	9
Gay men	8
Homosexuality and literature	7
Lesbians	7
Lesbians in literature	7
Bisexuality	3
Gay men in literature	3
Lesbian culture	3
Lesbianism in literature	3
Sex	3

Table VI.
Most frequently
occurring uniform
headings

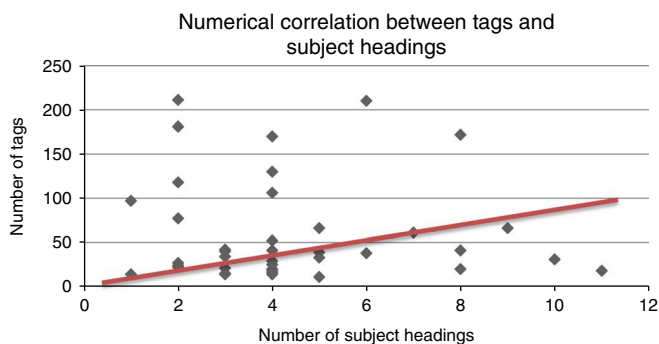


Figure 9.
Scatter diagram
demonstrating the
correlation between
the number of tags
and the number of
subject headings
per record, including
a line of best fit

observation as the potential for deconstruction is governed by the relationship between the number of tags and headings: a higher number of tags and smaller number of headings, we may presume, provides further scope for deconstruction, while a smaller number of tags and higher number of headings would limit the potential for deconstruction to occur. The fact that there is only limited correlation would suggest that the level of deconstruction identified in the following section is not particularly dictated by this external factor.

The deconstruction of LCSH was assessed through content analysis via the second coding scheme. For example, Record 3 has seven subject headings:

Homosexuality | Europe | Colonies | History
Gay men | Sexual behaviour | Europe | Colonies
Interpersonal relations | Europe | Colonies
Gay men | Africa | Social conditions
Gay men | Asia | Social conditions
Africa | Colonisation
Asia | Colonisation

There are 21 subdivisions among these, so this was the score given to the record. Of these terms, 11 are directly repeated in the tags, while eight of the components are referenced without being specifically copied – including more specific ways of expressing the concept “Europe”, and some basic synonyms for homosexuality. Finally, seven are referenced by associated terms which shift meaning: “colonisation” is, for example, connected to “exploitation” in the tags; and the emphasis on “gay men” in the subject headings is lost among the tags, which are split more equitably between gay men and women. The final results for this record are shown in Table VII.

The figures at the bottom of Table VII represent the score for each code as a percentage of the total score given to the record. It shows that just over half of the headings and their subdivisions appear identically in the tags, while a third are represented in an alternate way, either conceptually or linguistically. This indicates that deconstruction of LCSH is not only possible in tagging, but potently realised. Figure 10, below, demonstrates the final results for each record, showing the code score as a percentage of the total. The variation in maximum scores per record necessitated the use of percentages.

The results shown in Figure 10 demonstrate that it is slightly more likely that tags repeat the “dominant” perspective expressed in LCSH than any alternatives; however, some form of deconstruction was common, whether it was merely linguistic, or both

Heading	Units	CCLC	CCLD	CDLD
1	4	3	3	1
2	4	2	3	1
3	3	2	0	1
4	3	1	1	1
5	3	1	1	1
6	2	1	0	1
7	2	1	0	1
	21	11	8	7
		52.4	38.1	33.3

Table VII.
Results of LCSH
deconstruction
analysis for record 3

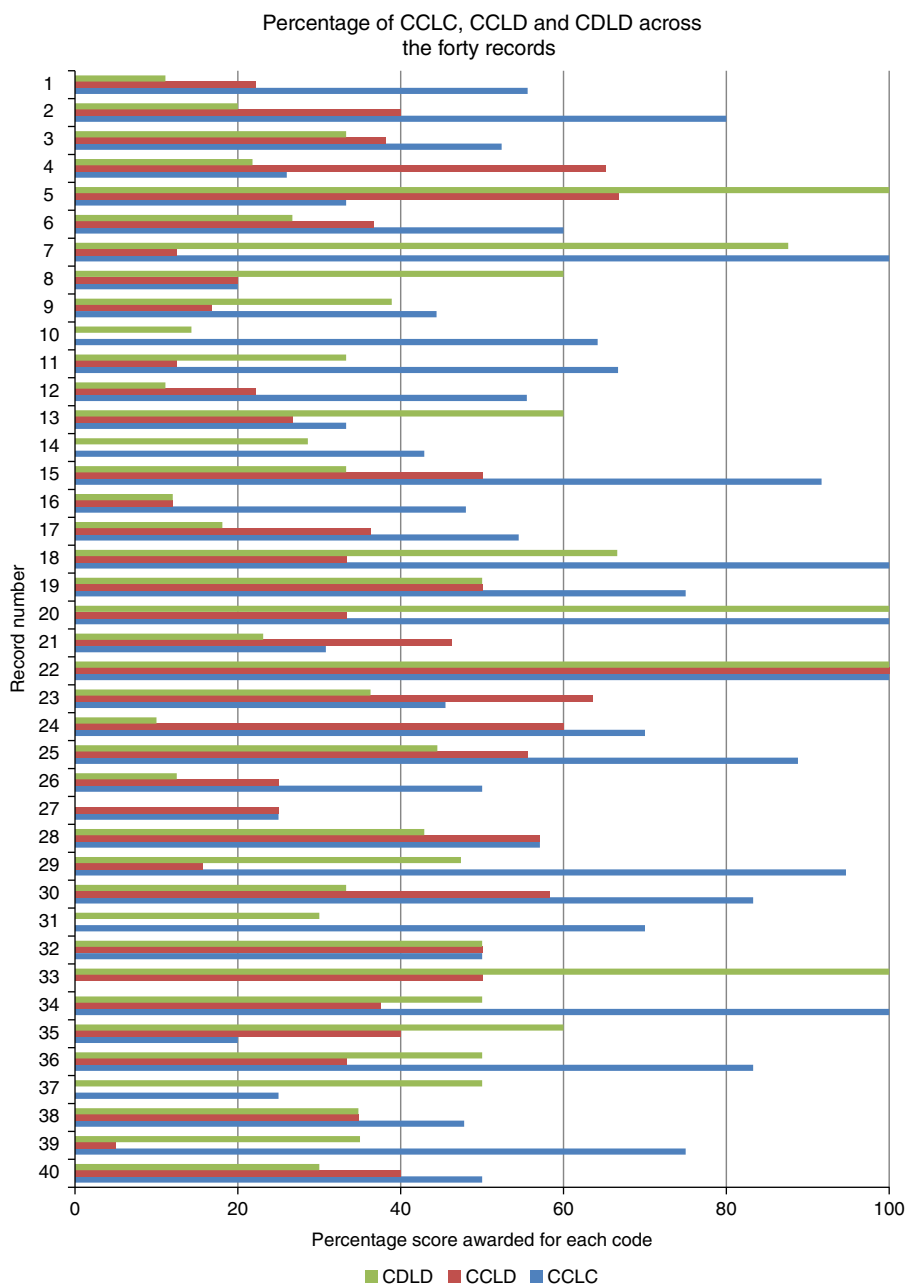


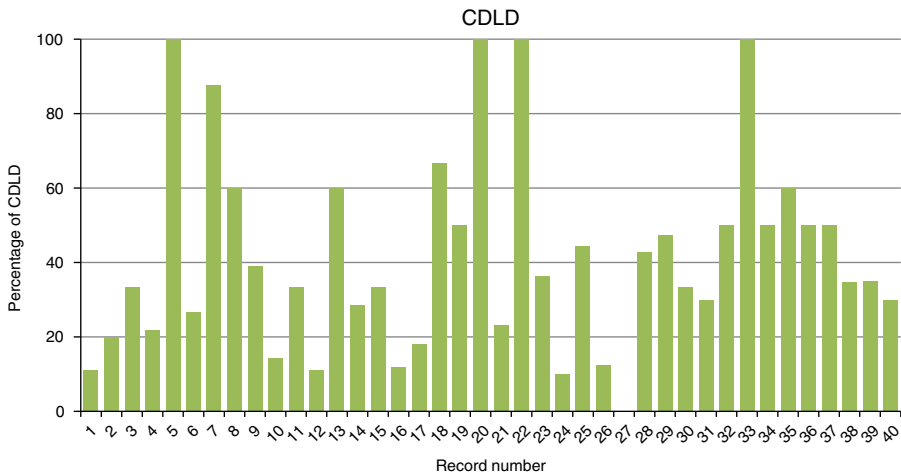
Figure 10.
Bar chart
demonstrating the
percentage scores
awarded to CCLC,
CCLD and CDLD
for each of
the 40 records

linguistic and conceptual. The results for the CDLD score (which represent deconstruction) are isolated and are shown in Figure 11. It shows that only one record had zero per cent deconstruction. The simple average of the deconstruction in records was 41.7 per cent, suggesting that deconstruction is not inevitable, nor uncommon.

JDOC
71,3

496

Figure 11.
Histogram showing
percentage scores for
CDLD in isolation



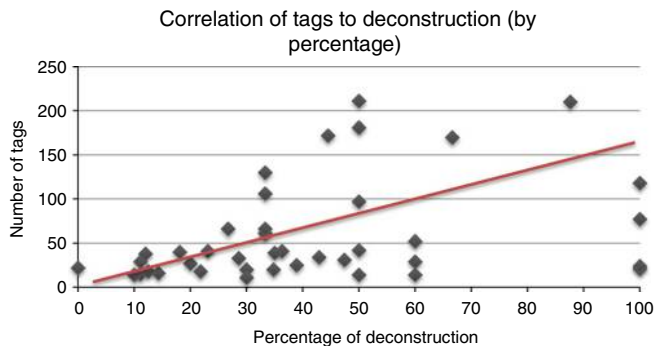
The deconstructed or other perspective is only ever presented as one of many interpretations. Tags withstand and represent several perspectives without necessarily underlining any one as dominant or otherwise.

A variable in the level of deconstruction is the number of tags present, as seen in Figure 9. More tags represent a greater opportunities for additional perspectives to be expressed. Figure 12 demonstrates the correlation of the number of tags in a record to the percentage of deconstruction in those records.

A line of best fit can be seen, but there is no unmistakable pattern. This suggests that the potential for deconstruction is not necessarily increased by more tags; and that even few tags represent a considerable opportunity for the presentation of “Other” views.

The rationale for structuring LCSH is based on a need for consistency (Chan, 1990, p. 7). The “uniform” heading is primary, and then further specified by secondary subdivisions, which incorporates a structure of power. Given that this research question scrutinised the relationship between uniform headings and subdivisions, the 46 headings without subdivisions were excluded. The analysis consisted in assessing each remaining subject heading against the tags to see if the uniform heading, or the subdivisions, appeared more prominently, both linguistically and conceptually. If the subdivisions were more prominent, then some form of structural deconstruction had occurred.

Figure 12.
Scatter diagram
showing correlation
between percentage
of deconstruction
of LCSH and number
of tags in that record



The analysis showed that 61 (46.5 per cent) of the 131 remaining subject headings represented the contents of the subdivisions more than the uniform heading. This was normatively because the tags qualified or diversified the secondary terms further, most frequently with reference to history. Types of history (“intellectual history”) and historical periods (“Victorian”) appeared as well as the subdivision. Another trend was for tags to more comprehensively represent the book’s format (e.g. “encyclopaedia”). In approximately half of the headings which were structurally deconstructed, the uniform term is very specific. This included names (“James Gardiner”), countries (“Asia”), ideologies (“Bohemianism”) or complex combined terms (“lesbians’ writing” or “bisexuality in art”). These terms may be more difficult to re-express or deconstruct, so the tendency towards deconstruction is perhaps marginally less patent than the results suggest. A final consideration returned to the fact that higher numbers of tags provide more opportunity for deconstruction. Figure 13 shows the results of a comparison between the percentage of subdivision prominence and the number of tags in that record. Again, there is no particular pattern, leading to the conclusion, as seen in the previous section, that even a small number of tags can structurally deconstruct LCSH.

The findings point to the consistent ability of tags to deconstruct authoritative subject analysis within a record, and to present any dominant views alongside alternative perspectives. Arguably the potential for deconstruction is universal, even if its realisation is less widespread. For example, the ongoing nature of tagging denotes the inherent possibility of continuing the process of deconstruction and, importantly, rescinds any chance of its reversal: it reflects a Derridean notion of *différance* in that the meaning of tags is never complete, but always deferred (Derrida, 1976, p 60f). Flax describes the goal of deconstruction: “if we do our work well, “reality” will appear even more unstable, complex and disorderly than it does now” (Flax, 1987, p. 643); in decentring the dominant view, and in breaking its hierarchical relationship with the Other by placing them in the same discursive framework, tagging appears to converge strongly with this goal.

However, as with *RQ2*, this concurrence appears to be accidental: tagging decentres the dominant view, but neither exposes nor judges it. Nor does tagging achieve the final stage of the deconstructive process, showing the “old structure, the dominant one, the mainstream, to be a constructed reality” (Olson, 1997, p. 185). Again, the convergence of tags with poststructuralist aims focuses on their lack of a definable centre, and again this is a deficiency which renders tags impractical from a systems perspective. By converting tags into something intrinsically useful, a structure is imposed, pointing to the inevitability

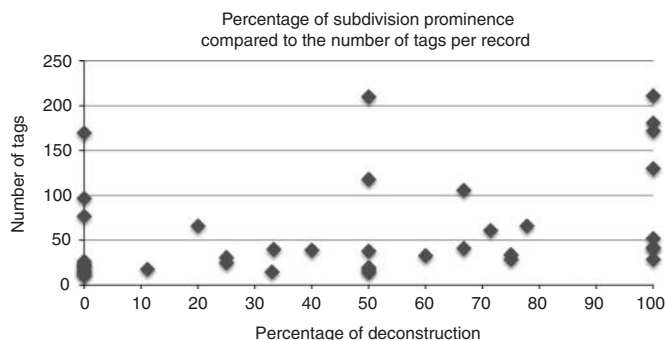


Figure 13.
Scatter diagram
showing the
correlation between
percentage of
subdivision
prominence and the
number of tags in
that record

of structures. There is, in this question, a further practical consideration which turns on the fact when tags and LCSH co-occur, such as in Catalogue A, tags are consistently presented as a supplement to, and not a replacement for, controlled vocabulary and taxonomy. This represents the imposition of a meta-structure, in the catalogue record itself: tags are themselves the binary Other to controlled vocabularies like LCSH.

Conclusion

The results and analysis seem to confirm the suggestion made in the Introduction that tagging is an imperfect analogy for the poststructuralist project. Tags are capable of undermining oppressive interpretations of texts, and provide space for the “Other”. Their inconclusive nature consistently and necessarily defers meaning, inferring that the meaning of a text is not unalterable. They destabilise the meaning attached to a text, loosening the grip of the dominant interpretation and unsettling notions of pragmatic categorisation. They permit that meaning to be expressed in ways which need not conform to any particular syntactical or orthographical standard. In these ways, tags have similarities to the goals of poststructuralist approaches to meaning, interpretation and signifying practice. These observations also confirm what has been found by previous studies into social tagging (e.g. Bates and Rowley, 2011).

Where this present study differs from others is in providing a critical way of thinking about the relationship between tags, especially in terms of the assertion that tags function as a statement in a discursive framework. As determined by *RQ1*, it is in the way that tags are amalgamated and presented that affects how their meaning is contained, conveyed and interpreted. However, the analysis in *RQ2* and *RQ3* would suggest that the discursive framework formed by tags alone is not the only one. The presence of tags alongside controlled metadata in a catalogue record forms another discursive framework. Though separately created, they contextualise each other; their co-occurrence reveals their differences and in doing so, produces meaning. Tags are presented in the way the catalogue is physically designed as the differential of institutionally applied metadata, and this is generative of knowledge. The catalogue record itself can be considered a discursive framework in which meaning is contained and expressed. Further, the relationship between tags and the text to which they refer is another discursive framework. Value and meaning are contained in their connection and relation to one another, and in the way that tags are able to intertextualise individual works through the attachment of shared signifiers. Approaching tags from a poststructuralist perspective underlines the relevance of presentation. It also conceptualises the library catalogue as a communicative tool able to generate knowledge and itself “caught up in a series of references” (Foucault, 2002, p. 25).

The analogy is, however, imperfect. There is a serious implication that the convergence between tagging and poststructuralism is accidental. While poststructuralism intends to expose and undermine the structures at play in language, tagging has no such objective. Shirky (2005) argues that tagging is not about asking whether “everyone [is] tagging any given link ‘correctly’” but rather “is anyone tagging it the way I do?” Poststructuralism would, with Shirky, relegate the idea of a “correct” perspective, but the conceptualisation of tagging as the amalgam of perspectives which purport meaning in terms of “the way I do” is at odds with poststructuralism. A tag is, itself, indicative of the episteme of the tagger. That episteme is never revealed, assessed or reversed, as poststructuralism would intend. It is, rather, subsumed into other epistemes as the tag ceases to be an individual perspective and becomes one part of one collection. The visibility of the episteme, or “the way I do”, is reduced. As tagging becomes bigger, it becomes more capable of incorporating epistemes, and of restricting the structures at play. It does not, however, expose or efface them.

The meaning expressed by tags remains referential of whatever external reality has affected the tagger, but the receiver's ability to interpret that is limited.

The analysis also suggested that the point at which tags serve a purpose as signifiers of meaning, or become useful to anyone but the tagger himself, is the point at which a structure is introduced. Several studies (e.g. Guy and Tonkin, 2006; Mejias, 2004; Furner, 2007) advocate the inclusion of tag guidelines, folksonomies, bundles or clouds; similarly, LibraryThing includes the option of organising tags by frequency. While this strongly suggests the limitations of the poststructuralist project by propounding the necessity and inescapability of structures if we are to facilitate resource discovery, it also indicates the ultimate irreconcilability between poststructuralism and tags as functioning, purposeful entities. Though the application of structures is unquestionably necessary, systems designers should be cognisant of the dangers contained in the structures they impose (Olson, 1997).

Analysing tagging from the perspective of poststructuralism allows us to conceptualise the practice without recourse to the boundaries imposed by the valuable but normative concerns of existing research. The suspension of these usual considerations in studies of tagging was only ever intended to be finite. Their temporary removal, however, means that they can resituated into a theoretical framework which permits us to think more critically about them. While these are topics for further research, the present study at the very least validates our paying attention to these considerations. This study makes no claims about tagging itself, however, it does perhaps say something about the data created by tagging. The hope is that it might provide a framework, possibly even a paradigm, for other research into tagging. Tagging is a social phenomenon, and it is this aspect, and the messy, jostling noisiness of its communicative practice, with which this research is concerned. It is hoped that this study should provide an incentive for further research into tagging, and by extension, LIS, from a critical theoretical perspective.

References

- Barthes, R. (1967), "Death of the author", *Aspen*, Nos 5-6, available at: www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen5and6/threeEssays.html#barthes (accessed 20 January 2012).
- Barthes, R. (1977), *Image–Music–Text* (Translated and edited by S. Heath), Fontana, London.
- Bates, J. and Rowley, J. (2011), "Social reproduction and exclusion in subject indexing: a comparison of public library OPACs and librarything folksonomy", *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 62 No. 2, pp. 431-448.
- Beasley, C. (1999), *What is Feminism? An Introduction to Feminist Theory*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Belsey, C. (2002), *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University, Oxford.
- Bogdan, R.C. and Biklen, S.K. (2003), *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*, 4th ed., Pearson, London.
- Capek, M.E.S. (Ed.) (1987), *A Women's Thesaurus: An Index of Language Used to Describe and Locate Information About Women*, Harper & Row, New York, NY.
- Chan, L. (1990), *Library of Congress Subject Headings: Principles of Structure and Policies for Application*, Cataloging Distribution Service, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- Christensen, H.D. (2010), "Roland Barthes: on semiology and taxonomy", in Leckie, G, Given, L.M. and Buschman, J.E. (Eds), *Critical Theory for Library and Information Studies: Exploring The Social from Across the Disciplines*, Libraries Unlimited, Santa Barbara, CA, pp. 75-88.
- Creswell, J.W. (2009), *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed., Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

- Deodato, J. (2010), "Deconstructing the library with Jacques Derrida: creating space for the 'other' in bibliographic description and classification", in Leckie, G., Given, L.M. and Buschman, J.E. (Eds), *Critical Theory for Library and Information Studies*, Libraries Unlimited, Santa Barbara, CA, pp. 75-88.
- Derrida, J. (1973), *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Sign* (Trans. by D.B. Allison), Northwestern University Press, Evanston.
- Derrida, J. (1976), *Of Grammatology*, (Trans. by G.C. Spivak), Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.
- Dynes, W. (1990), *Encyclopaedia of Homosexuality*, St James, Chicago, IL.
- Flax, J. (1987), "Postmodernism and gender relations in feminist theory", (electronic version) *Signs*, Vol. 12, pp. 621-643.
- Foucault, M. (1972), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Trans. by S. Smith), Pantheon, New York, NY.
- Foucault, M. (1979), *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (Trans. by R. Hurley), Allen Lane, London.
- Foucault, M. (1984), "What is an author?", in Rabinow, P. (Ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, Peregrine, Harmondsworth, pp. 101-120.
- Foucault, M. (2002), *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (Trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith), Routledge, London.
- Frohmann, B. (1994), "Discourse analysis as a research method in library and information science", *Library and Information Science Research*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 119-138.
- Furner, J. (2007), "User tagging of library resources: toward a framework for system evaluation", *International Cataloguing and Bibliographic Control*, Vol. 37, pp. 47-51.
- Gormly, K. (1997), "Poststructuralism", in Kowaleski-Wallace, E. (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Feminist Literary Theory*, Garland, New York, NY, pp. 317-319.
- Granström, J. (2007), "Social tagging: a study of a web 2.0 service in OPACs", available at: <http://bada.hb.se/bitstream/2320/2178/1/07-56.pdf> (accessed 20 January 2012).
- Greenblatt, E. (1990), "Homosexuality: the evolution of a concept in the library of congress subject headings", in Gough, C. and Greenblatt, E. (Eds), *Gay and Lesbian Library Service*, McFarland, Jefferson, MO, pp. 75-101.
- Greenblatt, E. (2010), "The treatment of LGBTIQ concepts in the library of congress subject headings", in Greenblatt, E. (Ed.), *Serving Lgbtiq Library and Archives Users: Essays on Outreach, Service, Collections and Access*, McFarland, Jefferson, MO, pp. 212-229.
- Gutting, G. (2005), *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Guy, M. and Tonkin, E. (2006), "Folksonomies: tidying up tags", *D-Lib Magazine*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 1082-9873, available at: www.dlib.org/dlib/january06/guy/01guy.html (accessed 27 September 2011).
- Hamer, E. (1996), *Britannia's Glory: A History of Twentieth Century Lesbians*, Cassell, London.
- Hammond, T., Hannay, T., Lund, B. and Scott, J. (2005), "Social bookmarking tools (I): a general review", *D-Lib*, Vol. 11 No. 4, pp. 1082-9873, available at: www.dlib.org/dlib/april05/hammond/04hammond.html (accessed 27 September 2011).
- Hughes, J.A. and Sharrock, W.W. (1997), *The Philosophy of Social Research*, 3rd ed., Longman, London.
- Johnson, C. (1997), *Derrida: the Scene of Writing*, Phoenix, London.
- Kipp, M.E.I. and Campbell, D.G. (2006), "Patterns and inconsistencies in collaborative tagging systems: an examination of tagging practices", *Proceedings of American Society for Information Science and Technology*, Vol. 43 No. 1, pp. 1-18.

- Kroski, E. (2005), "The hive mind: folksonomies and user-based tagging", available at: <http://infotangle.blogspot.com/2005/12/07/the-hive-mind-folksonomies-and-user-based-tagging/> (accessed 27 September 2011).
- Kroski, E. (2007), "Folksonomies and user-based tagging", in Courtney, N. (Ed.), *Library 2.0 and Beyond: Innovative Technologies and Tomorrow's User*, Libraries Unlimited, Westport, CT, pp. 91-103.
- Lather, P.A. (1991), *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy Within the Postmodern*, Psychology Press, Oxford.
- LibraryThing (2012), "Zeitgeist overview", available at: www.librarything.com/zeitgeist (accessed 12 January 2012).
- Lu, C., Park, J. and Hu, X. (2010), "User tags versus expert-assigned subject terms: a comparison of LibraryThing tags and library of congress subject headings", *Journal of Information Science*, Vol. 36. No. 6, pp. 763-779.
- Mathes, A. (2004), "Folksonomies: cooperative classification and communication through shared metadata", available at: www.adammathes.com/academic/computer-mediated-communication/folksonomies.html (accessed 27 September 2011).
- Mejias, U.A. (2004), "Bookmark, classify and share: a mini-ethnography of social practices in a distributed classification community", available at: <http://blog.ulisesmejias.com/2004/12/27/a-delicious-study/> (accessed 20 January 2012).
- Norris, C. (1987), *Derrida*, Fontana, London.
- Norton, R. (2008), "Bibliography of gay and lesbian history", available at: <http://rictornorton.co.uk/bibliog/index.htm> (accessed 20 November 2011).
- Olson, H. A. (2007), "How we construct subjects: a feminist analysis", *Library Trends*, Vol. 56 No. 2, pp. 509-541.
- Olson, H.A. (1997), "The feminist and the emperor's new clothes: feminist deconstruction as a critical methodology for library and information studies", *Library & Information Science Research*, Vol. 19 No. 2, pp. 181-198.
- Olson, H.A. (2000), "Difference, culture and change: the untapped potential of LCSH", in Stone, A. (Ed.), *The LCSH Century: One Hundred Years with the Library of Congress Subject Headings System*, Haworth, New York, NY, pp. 53-72.
- Olsson, M.R. (2010), "Michel Foucault: discourse, power/knowledge, and the battle for truth", in Leckie, G., Givenm, L.M. and Buschman, J.E. (Eds), *Critical Theory for Library and Information Studies*, Libraries, Unlimited, Santa Barbara, CA, pp. 63-74.
- Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* (2011), *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, available at: www.oed.com/ (accessed 20 January 2012).
- Peterson, E. (2006), "Beneath the metadata: some philosophical problems with folksonomy", *D-Lib*, pp. 12-11, available at: www.dlib.org/dlib/november06/peterson/11peterson.html (accessed 20 January 2012).
- Porter, J. (2005), "Controlled vocabularies cut off the long tail", available at: http://bokardo.com/archives/controlled_vocabularies_long_tail/ (accessed 18 November 2011).
- Poster, M. (1989), *Critical Theory and Poststructuralism: In Search of a Context*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.
- Quintarelli, E. (2005), "Folksonomies: power to the people", available at: www.iskoi.org/doc/folksonomies.htm (accessed 27 November 2011).
- Radford, G.P. and Radford, M.L. (2005), "Structuralism, poststructuralism, and the library: de Saussure and Foucault", *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 1 No. 61, pp. 60-78.
- Rafferty, P. and Hilderley, R. (2007), "Flickr and democratic indexing: dialogic approaches to indexing", *Aslib Proceedings*, Vol. 59 Nos 4/5, pp. 397-410.

- Rolla, P.K. (2009), "User tags versus subject headings: can user-supplied data improve subject access to library collections?", *Library Resources and Technical Services*, Vol. 53 No. 3, pp. 174-184.
- Shirky, C. (2005), "Ontology is overrated: categories, links and tags", available at: www.shirky.com/writings/ontology_overrated.html (accessed 27 September 2011).
- Smith, T.L. (2007), "Cataloguing and you: measuring the efficacy of a folksonomy for subject analysis", *Digital Library of Information Science and Technology*, available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10150/106434> (accessed 20 January 2012).
- Spalding, T. (2007), "When tags work and when they don't: Amazon and librarything", Thing-Ology Blog: Meaning, Methods and Debate", available at: www.librarything.com/blogs/thingology/2007/02/when-tags-work-and-when-they-dont-amazon-and-librarything/ (accessed 28 January 2012).
- Stewart, W. (1995), *Cassell's Queer Companion: A Dictionary of Lesbian and Gay Life and Culture*, Cassell, London.
- Trant, J. (2009), "Studying social tagging and folksonomy: a review and framework", *Journal of Digital Information*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 1-44, available at: <http://journals.tdl.org/jodi/article/view/269> (accessible 27 September 2011).
- Wood, D.C. and Bernasconi, R. (Eds) (1988), *Derrida and Difference*, Northwestern University, New York, NY.

Further reading

- Chow, R. (2006), "Poststructuralism: theory as critical self-consciousness", in Rooney, E. (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, Cambridge University, Cambridge, pp. 195-210.
- de Saussure, F. (1983), *Course in General Linguistics*, (Trans. by R. Harris), Open Court Classics, Chicago, IL.
- Lux, M., Granitzer, M. and Kern, R. (2007), "Aspects of broad folksonomies", *Proceedings of the 18th International Conference on Database and Expert Systems Applications*, IEEE Computer Society, Washington, DC, pp. 283-7.
- Merholz, P. (2005), "Metadata for the masses", available at: <http://adaptivepath.com/ideas/e000361> (accessed 28 September 2011).
- Sarup, M. (1993), *An Introductory Guide to Poststructuralism and Postmodernism*, 2nd ed., Harvester, New York, NY.

Corresponding author

Dr Pauline Rafferty can be contacted at: pmr@aber.ac.uk

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

This article has been cited by:

1. Diane Rasmussen Pennington Department of Computer and Information Sciences, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, United Kingdom . 2016. "The most passionate cover I've seen": emotional information in fan-created U2 music videos. *Journal of Documentation* 72:3, 569-590. [[Abstract](#)] [[Full Text](#)] [[PDF](#)]