Moving Beyond "…of its time": Statements on Harmful Content and Descriptions in Library and Archival Collections

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Many libraries and archives have recently released statements about harmful material in their collections and the descriptions of these collections. However, these types of statements are not required for any professional accreditation or membership, nor are there specific guidelines to follow. This study collected and analyzed statements from members of ARL (Association of Research Libraries) and CARL (Canadian Association of Research Libraries), measuring their prevalence and identifying common elements. The findings and discussion can be used as a resource by those hoping to create or amend a statement, and for the larger library community to take stock on this topic.

Introduction / Background

The vast collections within libraries and archives tell many stories—stories within the items collected, stories about those who collected, arranged and described those collections, as well as information about the time period in which both existed—and allow us to reflect on the time we live in now. Collections also shine a bright light on who and what is missing and misrepresented, both in the past and today. Many institutions are reckoning with materials in their collections, particularly how and why they were acquired and described, and are starting to acknowledge their subjective place in the social and cultural systems that shape these collections. One method institutions employ is writing statements on institutional websites, catalogs, records, archival descriptive notes, finding aid notes and digitized and born-digital content. For example, the University of Waterloo's Special Collections & Archives decided to move beyond blanket, single-sentence statements about "historical" content and language, which are often euphemisms for racist, sexist, exclusionary and many other types of harm. They decided instead to hold themselves accountable and to implement change, even without having all the answers; they released an expanded statement about harm found within the language of their archival descriptions.[1] Acknowledging harm can start to alter the story of the collection. When an institution acknowledges the problematic language in its descriptions or the materials in its collection, it begins to show the community that it is aware of its complicity and no longer willing to ignore its role. It is only then that libraries and archives can begin to

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move forward alongside all the patrons they serve. Many other libraries and archives have completed similar exercises, as documented by Cataloging Lab's "List of statements on bias in library and archives description."[2] This list is continuously updated. The statements in this list focus primarily on cataloging and description, such as University of Southern California Libraries' Statement on Anti-Racist Description.[3] However, many other institutions have released statements referring to the harmful material held within the text and imagery of collections, including Indiana University's Digital Collections' Harmful Language Statement.[4] These types of statements are not required for any kind of accreditation or membership, nor are there specific guidelines to follow. Statements are ad-hoc in nature and sometimes difficult to find. This study aims to inspire and help academic librarians and archivists in North America (and perhaps elsewhere) to take stock, to learn about what these statements contain and to discover their prevalence. In this study, all types of "statements'' from Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) and Association of Research Libraries (ARL) members were investigated, from single-sentence blanket statements about "historical language" to multi-page websites. This study investigates the following research questions:

1. What proportion of ARL and CARL member libraries have harmful language and/or content warnings?
2. Are the statements about cataloging and archival description or are they about the contents of the collections (text, speech, images, items)?
3. Are there trends and commonalities amongst the statements?

Results of this study can be used as a resource to create or amend a statement, in addition to starting a conversation about best practices and the creation of guidelines in this area within the larger library community.

For the purposes of this study, "language" refers to terms in the cataloging and archival description, whereas language that constitutes part of the item (e.g., racist language in a piece of correspondence included in an archival fonds) falls under the category of "collections and content." The authors acknowledge their own bias and privilege as white cisgender women who work in a large, research-intensive academic library.

Literature Review

Librarian and archival practice has traditionally been portrayed and self-represented as neutral and free from political entanglements.[5] It coalesces around the foundational myths that collections objectively reflect the recordkeeping practices of their creators, and that material is simply being exposed.[6] There is an ever-growing body of literature that shines a light on the ways in which every aspect of librarians' and archivists' practices, from appraisal to description, is permeated and shaped by bias, affecting what is collected and how it is showcased.[7] A profession long-dominated by white people,[8] alongside Christian, heterosexual norms[9] has resulted in language and practices that are exclusionary, racist, sexist, and "fraught with violence and othering."[10] While librarians and archivists work, "within and against these linguistic structures," building and extending them, and teaching patrons how to use them,[11] some information professionals are starting to acknowledge and learn more about underrepresented and unheard voices, these "silences and erasures in our archives."[12] This involves investigating ourselves with new and inclusive perspectives, and altering language that has been in place for decades. Some efforts are at the grassroots, individual level. For example, Ramirez points out that "whiteness" has several euphemisms amongst our collec-

tions and their descriptions, including "tradition," "neutrality," and "objectivity." This small example may seem subtle or banal to some but is glaringly exclusionary to others and needs to be examined. He states that having honest discussions about how the library and archives communities perpetuate inequality can be liberating, allowing for a freedom to start "the real work of documenting history."[13]

Other efforts are occurring on a larger scale, such as librarian and archivist responses and recommendations related to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action.[14] For example, the framework developed by the Steering Committee on Canada's Archives aims to identify how archives in Canada can move toward reconciliation and decolonization of practice[15] and the Canadian Federation of Library Associations-Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques (CFLA-FCAB) aims to highlight best practices in place across Canada and foster greater cooperation at the federal level.[16] Both grassroots and large-scale efforts are critical for systemic changes to take place.

Some discussions about change in this area revolve around one major component of description: subject headings in library collections. These have been debated, examined and critiqued for decades, for their inherent bias and harm, and inaccuracy in representing certain communities.[17] As Adler notes, there is a growing recognition in some circles that library classifications are, "reflective of the times and spaces in which they are created, revised, and amended as well as the perspectives and interests of the writers of the classifications, and… we must now take for granted that classifications are inherently biased."[18] As Berry points out, "the language serves the systems, not the subjects."[19] Librarians and archivists are in a good position to locate the need and possibilities for "repair and redress."[20] Offensive and outdated terminology has been the topic of many studies;[21] most recently, the publicity and politicization of efforts to replace the subject heading *illegal aliens* resulted in the Library Congress's ("LC") eventual implementation of the terms "*unauthorized immigration*" and "*noncitizens.*"[22] This case illustrates the considerable amount of effort and time needed to effect change to problematic LC subject headings. While alternative subject headings can be implemented at a local or consortial level, as discussed in by Bone and Lougheed,[23] this is a resource-intensive practice that presents a variety of challenges for libraries.[24]

As well as changes to subject headings in library collections, there is a movement calling for descriptive equity[25] and reparative archival practice to address and redress the power imbalances, harm and erasure resulting from previous practice. There are many examples of case studies where these principles have been applied.[26] Suggested strategies and practices include:

- Diversification of archives, advocacy/promotion, and utilization;[27]
- Reparative archival description: describing and naming whiteness, rather than solely including racial descriptors of non-white subjects;[28] describing and contextualizing racist or problematic language, as well as racist policies and practices that shaped collections; and being transparent and accountable by preserving evidence of racism in legacy description for future study;[29]
- Naming the subjects of records to the same extent as the creators of the content/records[30] and respecting and using the self-descriptive terms and names chosen or preferred by the subjects of the records.[31]

Additionally, many institutions create statements related to bias, harm, exclusionary and offensive language within descriptions and content of the materials (in text, speech, images).

Rogers wrote that these types of statements acknowledge the historical record and may counteract or alleviate harm. She draws attention to the notion that intolerance and misinformation may inflict many different types of harm.[32] While appearing with increasing frequency in both libraries and cultural heritage institutions, these kinds of statements are relatively recent within the long history of libraries and archives. Many statements have been created in the past decade, resulting in a new body of literature consisting primarily of case studies from individual institutions.

For example, Danielle Robichaud, Digital Archivist at the University of Waterloo, described the evolution of her department's statement of language in archival descriptions.[33] The process she described is familiar: conversations over several years, combined with a change in resource (in this case, staffing and a platform to manage records), eventually culminating in working on changes to processes and a statement. In another example, Rogers describes how one donation was the catalyst to implement a statement at Irvine Sullivan Ingram Library at the University of West Georgia.[34] Although the impetus behind such statements is not always disclosed, two major factors are mentioned more than most. The first is increased awareness/sensitivity around anti-Black racism. At an institutional level, references are made to institutional efforts, such as upholding new statements of values or principles. Sector-wide, within the library and archive communities, reference is made to professional responsibilities in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement and the murder of George Floyd through statements by the American Library Association,[35] the Society of American Archivists,[36] as well as the Anti-Racist Description Resources by Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia.[37]

The second factor was institutions being forced to reckon with these issues when attention was drawn to racist and otherwise offensive material held in their archives and/or digital collections. This is most explicit in cases where photographs of students and staff in blackface were featured in digitized yearbooks. Much attention was brought to instances of this at Hollins University when the institution removed issues of the yearbook from the digital archives until a contextual statement could be posted.[38] The SAA condemned this removal, pointing to the SAA Core Values Statement,[39] and noting that, "impeding access to archival materials that were produced by the institution and that serve to demonstrate the institution's beliefs and norms at the time of production denies the ability to hold the institution accountable for these actions and choices."[40] Other similar examples continue to be found throughout the United States,[41] and in response, more statements are popping up.

Outside of published studies, gray literature also addresses harmful language/content statements. These typically provide insight into working with collections and descriptions, as well as the context of creating statements in a less formal manner. Librarians and archivists can learn from these experiences when making changes at their own institutions. For example, a librarian at the University of North Georgia presented on the process of drafting a statement, including the supporting role of other departments in the university.[42] University of Indiana librarians presented on the harmful language and content reporting system (including a content warning) implemented in their Digital Collection Services.[43] In the UK, Jessica Smith wrote a blog post detailing the issues that served as an impetus to her creating the first content warning on an archival collection at the University of Manchester.[44] Some have gone beyond case studies, including Recollection Wisconsin, a collection of digital cultural heritage resources from local libraries, archives, museums and historical societies. Employees there created a toolkit of resources for institutions considering creating their own statements, highlighting

some of the elements that commonly appear in these statements.[45] Finally, a group from the University of Toronto used their review of the statements listed on the Cataloging Lab website, to inform the creation of their own statements.[46] While their sample was fewer than the number of statements included in this study, they reported on several similar themes, such as inclusion of supplementary resources, justification for providing access to harmful content, noting specific groups identified, user feedback, action and more.

This study aims to add to the literature through a systematic and widespread analysis of statements present in Canadian and American research university libraries. These results will demonstrate what has been done already regarding statements of harm, and in doing so, will highlight what work is still outstanding. It will provide a tool to help librarians and archivists reflect on current practices, and hopefully allow everyone to aim higher in future endeavors, by showing what is possible.

Methodology

The initial sample of libraries in this study included all 109 ARL and twenty-nine CARL member libraries, with 138 libraries in all. The authors manually searched each library website for a statement relating to harmful content, bias, warning, archival or cataloging procedures. Statements ranged from a single sentence on a collection/archive, a warning or label about "historical language," to lengthy webpages discussing potential types of harm within collections and descriptions, to explanations of the library and institution's actions, and everything in between. The authors included all types of statements in the study. From December 2021 to January 2022, the authors ran Google searches and browsed the websites of target institutions to locate statements. From February through May 2022, the authors emailed librarians from a special collections, archival or digital collections unit to ask if the library had a public-facing statement. When a named contact was not listed, the authors sent an email to the unit's contact form or generic email address asking if the library or unit used statements of this kind. Only publicly accessible statements were included in the study; internal statements and policies described in the email responses were excluded. Through email replies, eleven libraries indicated that they did not have public-facing statements but were working toward creating one. New statements have been released since the data-gathering phase of this study. Although the authors did not formally gather data on why institutions did not have statements, some respondents indicated that barriers or delays to creating statements included lack of institutional support as well as limited time and resources to prioritize this work. Others mentioned that they had encountered resistance to undertaking this work at their institutions due to fears that being explicit about the harmful aspects of their collections would draw attention to them and result in unwanted controversy. Others indicated that this type of work is needed but may be uncomfortable, and systems are not in place to support employees.

Where institutions had multiple statements, all statements were considered as a whole, as a representation of the institution's entire effort. For example, when an institution had a public-facing statement related to its archives or archival description and a separate statement related to the content or cataloging of its library collections, both were included in this study. Likewise, statements by various units or institutions within consortia were considered as a whole. Exceptionally, the University of California ("UC") schools were considered separately. The libraries within the UC system have a joint statement; however, some UC libraries also have additional, more specific statements. For that reason, it was pertinent to consider them

as unique institutions. Further, an institution- or collection-wide statement was not required for inclusion in the study; where a statement or note appeared on a single digital collection or finding aid this was included.

The authors created a rubric to systematically record the elements in the statement, including whether the statements referred to collections (materials) or description (cataloging and/or archival description). Collection/materials can refer to anything collected or managed by a library or archive, such as books, digital collections, artifacts, archival collections, images, yearbooks, journals and more. The location of the statements on the institutions' website was noted, such as on the unit's homepage or within a cataloging record. In some cases, a statement was delivered via a pop-up image filter that the user must click through to access the content. In these cases, an accompanying note sometimes explained why the filter was used, for example, "This image contains graphic violence." Other times, the filter did not have any accompanying notes or metadata to explain why it was placed over an image. The rubric was also used to note the method for contacting the unit within the statement, links to further reading, as well as other statements that were listed as inspiration or commitments for improvement (e.g. a unit may commit to update procedures or create working groups to focus on this work). Collating these aspects may help others learn about what is possible and in making decisions when creating and updating their own statements.

Additionally, under "Types of Harm Mentioned," the rubric noted when specific marginalized groups and types of harm were specified in the statements, such as racist, colonialist or sexist material or language. To be included in the rubric, types of harm had to be explicitly named in the statements, and not inferred. This study did not determine if they were accurately representing the description or content but merely noted them, so others can see what has been included in these types of statements. Some types of harm were grouped together in the rubric for readability, and the authors recognize there is bias in creating these groups. When multiple types of harm were mentioned, all were noted; as such, percentages do not sum to 100 percent. For example, a statement that included a phrase such as, "this collection contains racist and sexist content," would be marked both under "racism" and "gender/sexism/misogyny/misogynoir." Additionally, sometimes a statement included a general phrase that the descriptions may be "offensive" and a specific type of harm, such as "ableism," was referred to for a single collection. In that case, the statement would be noted in the rubric under "Offensive/sensitive problematic/objectionable/inappropriate" and "ableism."

Finally, each statement was coded as being a "disclaimer" or "acknowledging harm." Statements referring to the collections or descriptions as simply being a 'product of its time,' or 'historical language' were marked as 'disclaimer'. Often these were short, blanket statements for an entire collection or institution. Statements that indicated that their description or content could cause harm in some way, those that had a regretful tone, or those that indicated extra care might be required were marked as "acknowledging harm." When completing the rubric, the most generous interpretation was given. For example, if a statement had a single-sentence disclaimer that the archival description was historical and based on Library of Congress subject headings that cannot change, but also indicated that the library was taking other steps—such as creating a committee and updating notes on digital collections—it was marked as "acknowledging harm."

Authors coded the statements separately and discussed discrepancies until a consensus was reached.

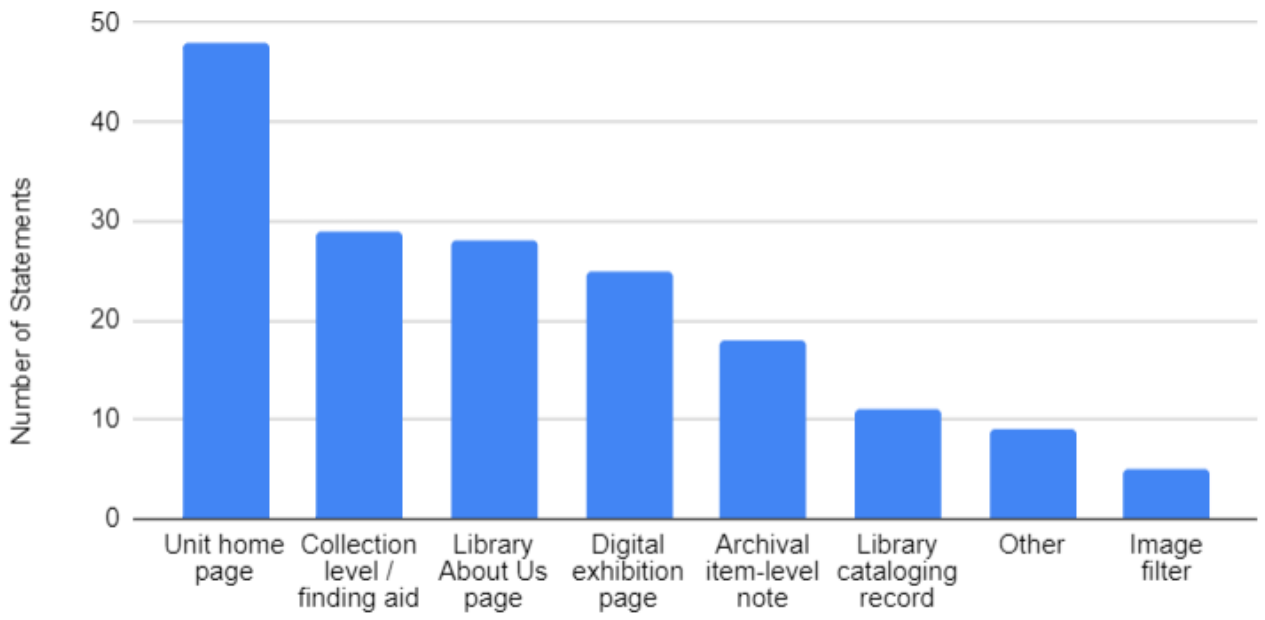
Results

This study identified statements from eleven CARL and sixty-five ARL member libraries, resulting in seventy-six statements in all, or 55 percent of the initial sample. Percentages below are based on the final sample of seventy-six statements. Nearly one-third (32 percent) of those with statements indicated that their institution was working toward improving or adding to their existing statement, but their efforts were not yet public.

Statements could pertain to the content of the collection/materials or cataloging/description. Some institutions had one statement that referenced both, and others had multiple statements. Of the statements in the study, 78 percent (fifty-nine statements) pertained to the collection, and 71 percent (fifty-four statements) pertained to the language in cataloging and description.

The majority of statements, 63 percent, appeared on or were linked from the homepage of special collections and/or archives units, digital collections homepages or the opening screen of a digital collection platform. Statements were sometimes linked in multiple locations (see figure 1). Options noted in "Other" results include blogs, the advanced search page of the library catalog, feedback forms, banners on the catalog (and thus appearing on every record), and the library's legal information page.

FIGURE 1
Where Does the Statement Appear?



Contact Methods

Contact methods related to the statements were noted in the rubric (see table 1). Typically, statements would contain a sentence such as, "If you have feedback or questions about this statement, please contact X." General contact information displayed in website banners or footers that did not relate directly to statements, or "Ask Us!" banners/links to virtual reference were excluded. Some libraries and archives had multiple contact methods and all methods were counted in the rubric. Of special note, UC libraries did not include individuals' email

addresses; however, the Heads of Special Collections Common Knowledge Group University of California Libraries were listed at the end of their primary statement. As these were not specifically listed as contacts, they were not included in the count under "an email address for a specific person."

TABLE 1
Contact Method for Feedback

Method	Count	Percentage
General email address for the unit or library	26	34%
Link to a contact form	22	29%
Phone number	6	8%
Email address for a specific person	4	5%
Email address for a working group	3	4%
Email for a specific role	1	1%

Created By and Last Updated Dates

It is helpful for readers of webpages to know when the page was created or updated. As such, this was noted in the rubric, showing that 34 percent of statements had either a created date or a date of when it was updated.

External Reasons for Creation

While there may be many factors that lead to the creation of these statements, external reasons for creation were listed in 16 percent of statements. These typically include sentences such as "in accordance with" the university's principles, policies, statements of value, or calls to action for specific commitments.

Additional Reading, Referenced Statements and Codes

Links to additional reading were found on 38 percent of statements (twenty-nine). Twenty-four institutions (32 percent) indicated that the statements were based on similar statements from other institutions. Temple University Libraries' statement was referenced the most often, in 14 percent of statements (eleven mentions), followed by Princeton, with 8 percent (six mentions). Yale, Drexel, Duke, University of Colorado Boulder and University of Virginia were referenced in two to three statements each (3-4 percent of the statements). Many others were referenced a single time.

Of the formal codes and guidelines in statements, the "Society of American Archivists Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics," was mentioned the most often, in 16 percent of statements, followed by the "ACRL Code of Ethics for Special Collections Librarians" and the "Society of American Archivists' Statement of Principles Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)," which were both mentioned in 12 percent of statements. The Anti-Racist Description Resources by Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia was included in 8 percent of statements (n= 6). Many others were mentioned a single time.

Reasoning

The authors devised the rubric by extrapolating the most common elements across statements. In addition to this, several other elements may be relevant for professionals consider-

ing the composition or review of statements. For example, a number of institutions included implicit and explicit explanations as to why the institution devoted resources to collecting, preserving and providing access to potentially harmful language and materials. For example, one statement said, "the archival resources in this exhibition contain offensive and outdated language. We chose not to censor these items in order to accurately represent the bias and prejudice of the time."[47] University of Maryland Libraries states, "this exhibition includes historical attitudes and beliefs about race that are offensive and dehumanizing. We present them in order to provide a more complete and critical examination of the past."[48] The National Archives includes a similar statement: "NARA's mission is to preserve and provide access to the permanent records of the federal government. NARA, working in conjunction with diverse communities, will seek to balance the preservation of this history with sensitivity to how these materials are presented to and perceived by users."[49]

Acknowledging Harm

Short, blanket statements referring to "historical" language and content were marked as 'disclaimers' in the rubric. Statements showing that the library or archive was recognizing harm and that extra care is required to use the collections and read descriptions, were marked as "acknowledging harm." The most generous interpretation of the statements were applied. Of the seventy-six statements in the study, 37 percent (twenty-eight), were marked as disclaimers and 63 percent (forty-eight) were categorized as acknowledging harm. When considering all 138 CARL and ARL member institutions, 35 percent of members have some kind of statement acknowledging harm (forty-eight).

The statements were analyzed for any mention of specific types of harm, and reference to specific groups, events, or categories. table 2 shows the most commonly mentioned types of harm.

TABLE 2
Most Commonly Mentioned Types of Harm

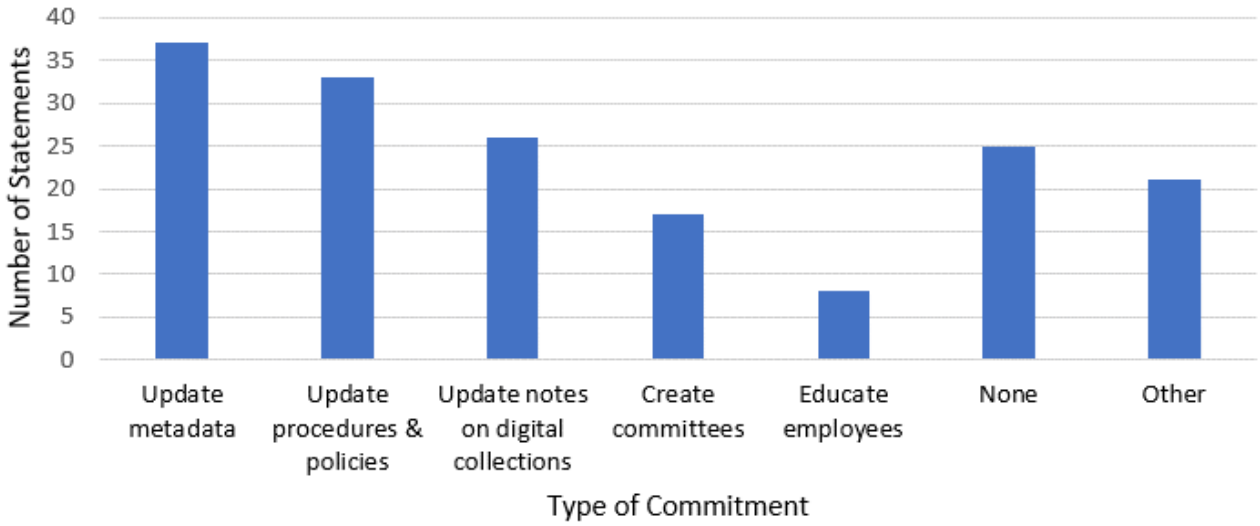
Types of Harm Mentioned	Count	Percentage
Racism	37	49%
Gender/sexism/misogyny/misogynoir	34	45%
Other	29	38%
Sexual orientation/LGBTQ+ /homophobic/ transphobic	29	38%
Ableism	21	28%
Offensive/sensitive/problematic/objectionable/inappropriate	21	28%
Stereotypes	19	25%
Indigenous peoples	14	18%
Black people/culture	13	17%
Colonialism/Imperialism	12	16%
Immigrants/Undocumented immigrants	8	11%
Violence	8	11%
Marginalized people/communities	6	8%
Xenophobic	6	8%
Religion	5	7%

The "Other" category is composed of categories or terms mentioned one or two times amongst all statements. Larger themes emerged from the terms, including gentrification, unhoused people, underrepresented and unserved communities, medical procedures, war, crime and terrorism and terms related to class structure.

Commitments

Some statements included commitments to the wider community regarding additional work that will continue or that is forthcoming, to attempt to move forward in a harm-reducing way. These ranged from broad statements to "do better," and "elevate narratives," to specific lists of action items, such as those described on Yale's Bias Awareness and Responsibility Committee.[50] Time and resource commitments vary widely by institution, and these results provide examples of what can be done; they should not become a prescription. About one-third (33 percent) of statements did not contain commitments of any kind. Updating metadata was the commitment mentioned most frequently, in 49 percent (thirty-seven) statements, followed by updating procedures and policies, updating notes on digital collections, creating committees and educating employees (see figure 2).

FIGURE 2
Commitments



Outside these main categories, other commitments were noted, including working with members of marginalized communities to update language, policies, and collections to become more inclusive and diverse. Some statements referred to prioritizing recruitment of people who have been systematically and historically unrepresented and underrepresented. Several statements also mentioned looking through content for marginalized voices to enhance discoverability of non-white cultures.

Discussion

Given the history of the professions of librarians and archivists, it is unsurprising that collections and discovery are deeply impacted by the myth of neutrality.[51] Archival professionals have started work to overcome this tradition;[52] some of the commitments mentioned in these

statements of harm are examples of this work. Racism and sexism are the most commonly mentioned types of harm in the statements in this study, possibly because instances of these types of systemic harm have already been publicly uncovered in many institutions. As statements of harm are often a first step, many include broad categories, like "racist," without providing more detail about specific communities. When the harms related to specific communities, items and collections are identified, the statements become more useful to everyone, including the employees who work in the institutions, the patrons they serve, and the people and places represented in the collections. As Rogers states, a "synergy occurs when people come together to discuss an issue; the sum is greater than its parts."[53] However, detailed statements and commitments to changing processes require ample resources to analyze and prioritize this work.[54] Nevertheless, starting with a broad statement is more helpful than not having a statement at all. Over time, these can be updated, potentially in collaboration with the affected community groups.

The impact of meaningful statements reaches beyond acknowledgement of the collections and descriptions themselves, beyond a simple warning. While they do not absolve institutions nor "fix" systemic issues, statements represent a signal that the institution is aware of its complicity in perpetuating harmful acquisition and descriptive practices and recognizes the complexity of the situation rather than ignoring it. As Warren states, "when archives ignore or emphasize one narrative over another, it influences how people see themselves and how others see them."[55] Douglas encourages actively embracing what she called the "constructedness" of archival fonds, to openly acknowledge that archives are, "built by many hands and formed over time."[56] Both Warren and Douglas highlight the need for institutions to continue looking at and improving upon its conventions, traditions and processes. A statement is a start. It is positive that over half of CARL and ARL member institutions already have a statement of harm of some kind, and that many are working toward creating or improving one.

Many of the statements in this study (63 percent) were located on the homepage of special collections, archives and digital collections. However, patrons often arrive at a record, note, or digital collection through a different page—such as a catalog, database or an internet search engine—and may not see the statement. Moreover, the statements in this study were often not easily findable through a Google search or a scan of the institution's website; rather, direct links were made available through the email replies received while conducting this research. When statements are more general in nature, about entire collections, subject headings or problematic areas at a high-level, it may be appropriate to have them on the special collections or archives' homepages. However, having them visible, or linked to, within the records of library catalogs or archival records would make them easier for patrons to come across.

Furthermore, institutions that have more resources to dedicate to this work can place notes or statements directly on the page about the items. A common example of this is when yearbooks contain offensive content. Currently, many yearbook collections contain a single-sentence blanket statement about historical language/images that can be found on the webpage with information about the yearbooks. In the future, this would be a good place for a longer statement about harmful content, in tandem with item-level details on specific yearbooks. More research is needed about where best to place these types of statements for meaningful visibility and impact.

Easily available contact information and dates of when the statement was last updated provide credibility. They are signals to patrons that the institutions are taking the statement

seriously enough that they have provided and prioritized resources recently, and are open to receiving feedback. Some institutions simply do not have these resources yet. As time passes, language evolves and new ways of thinking come to light, so a date on these types of statements is extremely important; however, only 34 percent of statements had either a created date or a date of when it was updated. The most common contact methods found on statements in this study included a general email address for the unit or library (34 percent) and links to contact forms (29 percent).

While 16 percent of statements explicitly stated they were created due to an external reason—such as in accordance with a set of principles, policies, or call to action—it is possible that this number could be higher. Some institutions may have chosen not to disclose this information within their statements. For example, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action include steps for archives, museums, and Library and Archives Canada regarding records relevant to the history and legacy of the residential school system, and a national review of best practices.[57] This work may be ongoing but simply not posted in a public statement. Regardless of whether the reasons for creating the statement are disclosed, creating these types of statements builds community within the people who work at the institution, and it fosters discussion and engagement between the institutions and the communities they serve.[58] Patrons and employees may also stand to learn from the additional readings when they are provided.

Writing these statements of harm is a relatively new practice in the library and archives community. As such, there is a lack of best practices, standards or codes from the major associations to help guide their creation. Having these types of statements or prioritizing this work is also not a condition of membership in ARL or CARL. Many statements are created in a grassroots fashion, often pushed forward because of a personal interest of a single librarian or archivist. It would help the profession as a whole, and the patrons they serve, if best practices or standards were released to guide this work, as it can be overwhelming to get started. Until then, the results of this study will hopefully help those who are thinking of writing or improving a statement and provide resources for creating one.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation to this study is that the sample included only ARL and CARL member libraries. The authors chose this sample because they work in an ARL- and CARL-member institution, but it is in no way reflective of the qualification or ability of institutions to formulate and disseminate these types of statements. Future studies could broaden the scope to other geographic areas, other types of libraries and other types of institutions and collections, including galleries, museums and beyond. For example, Cataloging Lab's List of Statements includes many excellent and interesting statements from other types of organizations and jurisdictions. Much can be learned by venturing beyond the library and archives landscape.

This study is also limited by the authors' privilege and bias as white cisgender women who work in a large, research-intensive academic library. This area of study would benefit from the perspectives and knowledge of a more diverse group of authors, and would be enriched by interviews with community members, both as subjects and users of the collections to which these statements pertain.

One of the challenges noted in the literature—and by librarians and archivists who were contacted for this study—was the constraints imposed by library and archival technologies

and systems. Other methods for acknowledging harm, such as through new interpretations of archival processing notes or the creation of accompanying LibGuides were outside the scope of this study but may address some of these challenges.[59]

Future research could also include a deeper analysis related to the content of these types of statements and a reflection on the objectives of creating them. What do different types of communities want these statements to address? What is helpful for different types of researchers to know ahead of time? Are they effective? Where did the authors get it wrong? Further research might also investigate the processes by which these statements were created, approved and disseminated. Compiling qualitative data on what worked well, the challenges encountered and how these were addressed may serve institutions looking to implement similar statements. These questions can be investigated as libraries and archives continue to acknowledge their past and move forward, respectfully.

Conclusion

The types of statements analyzed in this study are a first step, the start of a bridge to close the gap into finding out who and what is missing, misrepresented and underrepresented within the stories of our collections and descriptions. They can help show the community how an institution is reckoning with its own role, and can help us reflect and move forward in collaboration with our patrons in a way that was not common in the recent past. This study shows the quantity and commonalities amongst the statements within the ARL and CARL member institutions today. In time, perhaps with some guidance from the large associations, we can move beyond these types of studies and see the creation and implementation of best practices. Hopefully institutions will continually increase their support for prioritizing this type of work so that the stories can continue to evolve and so all patrons can be included respectfully.

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