

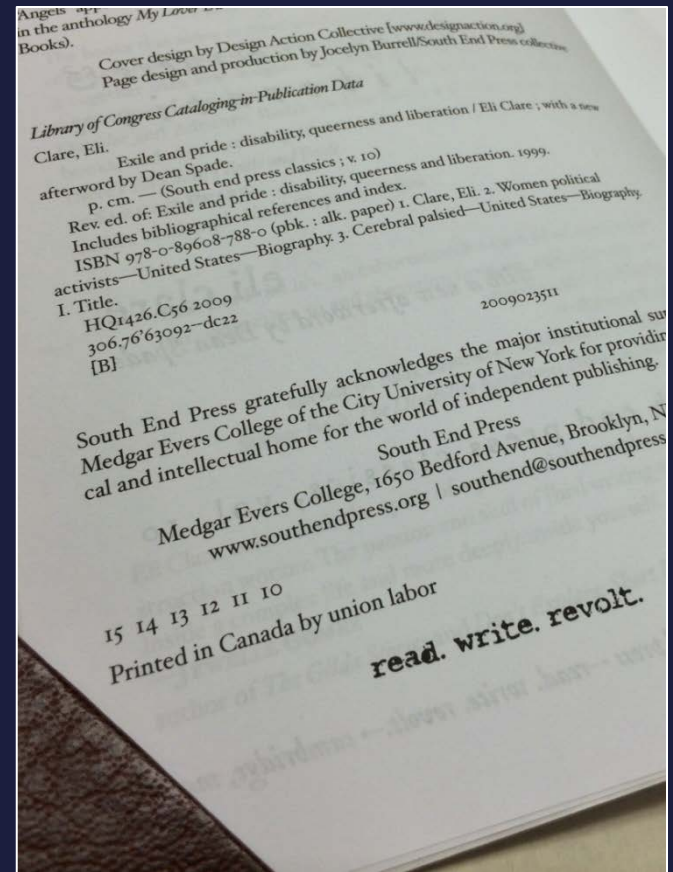
# Engaging an Author in a Critical Reading of Subject Headings

Amelia Koford

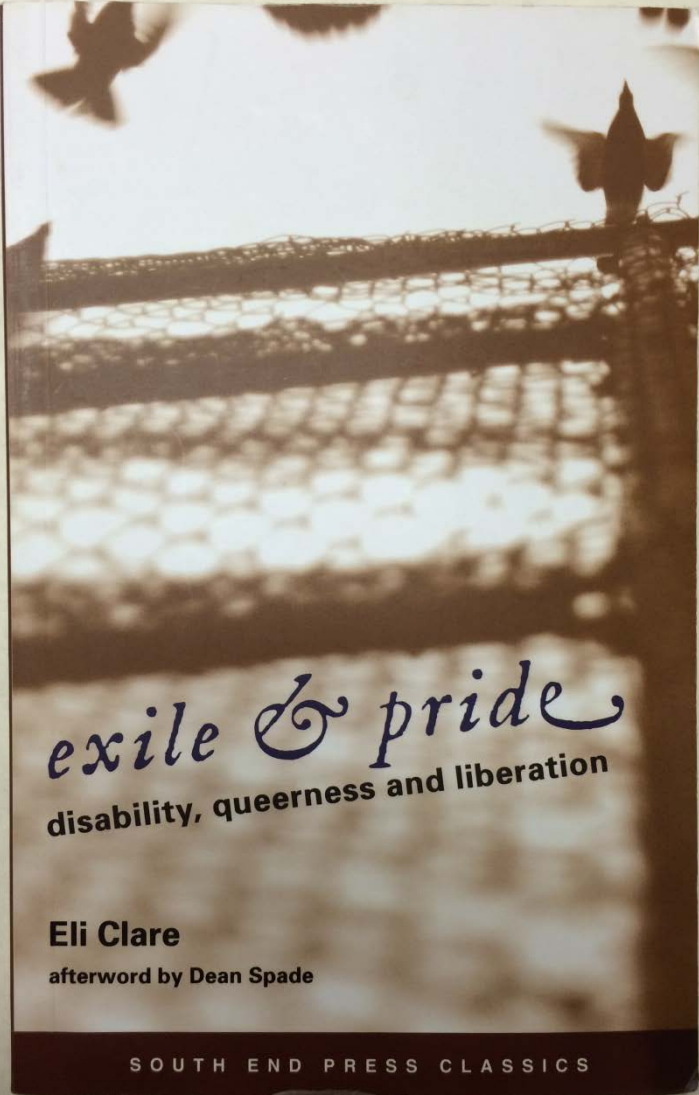
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Gender and Sexuality in Information Studies Colloquium  
October 18, 2014



*exile & pride*

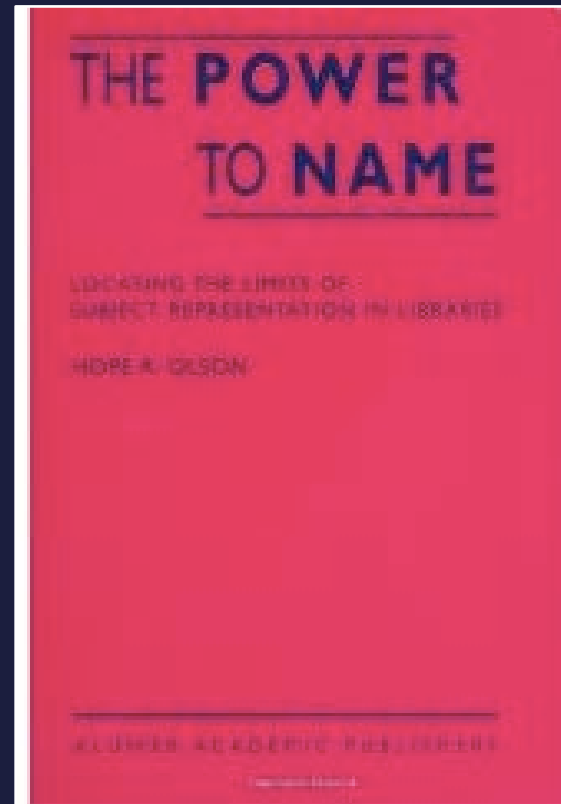
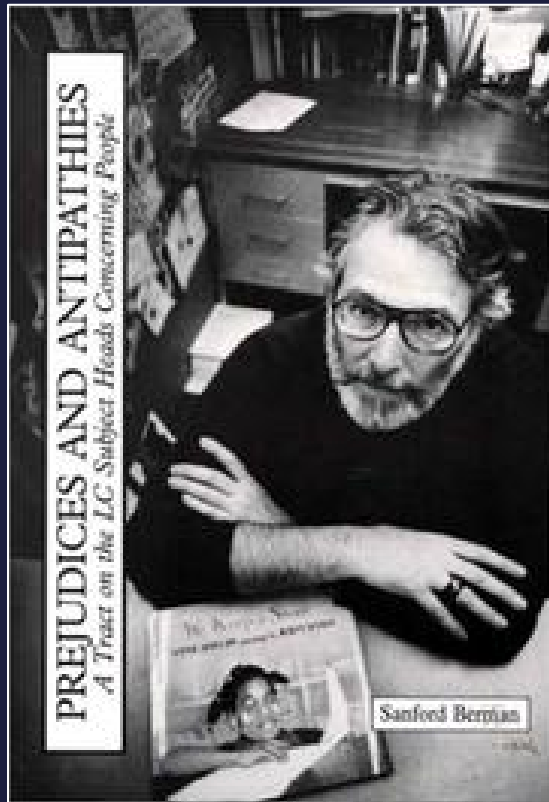
disability, queerness and liberation

**Eli Clare**

afterword by Dean Spade

SOUTH END PRESS CLASSICS

# Critiques of Subject Access Standards



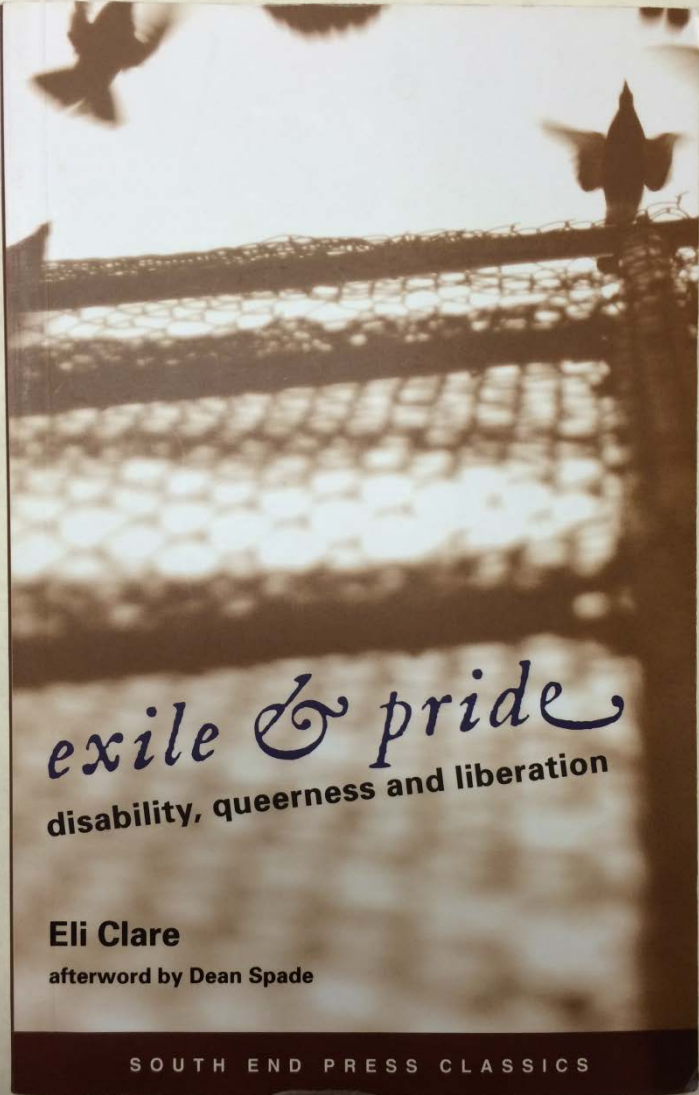
**DELINQUENTS** See also **CASTRATION OF CRIMINALS AND DEFECTIVES.** / **DEGENERATION.** / **IDIOCY.** / **INSANITY.** Are you getting a feeling for what the Library of Congress believes the characteristics of delinquents are or what should be done to delinquents?

**FEEBLEMINDED** An archaic cross-reference to **MENTALLY HANDICAPPED.**

**FREAKS** Until recently an obscene cross-reference to **MONSTERS** and to **DEFORMITIES**, which meant physically disabled humans. "Freaks" is still a cross-reference to **MONSTERS.**

Davis and Davis, *Mainstreaming Library Service for Disabled People*, 1980

- Inherent limitations of subject access
- What to do?
  - Campaign for change
  - Tagging and other technologies to supplement headings
  - Acknowledge bias
  - Use as teaching tool



*exile & pride*

disability, queerness and liberation

**Eli Clare**

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Painting by Riva Lehrer



## Background

### About Eli

White, disabled, and genderqueer, Eli Clare has a B.A. in Women's Studies, a M.F.A. in Creative Writing, and most importantly a penchant for rabble-rousing. [\(Read more.\)](#)

### Where Eli's Worked

From UC Berkeley to the Trans Politics Conference in New York City, Eli has worked with a variety of communities, organizations, and institutions. [\(Read more.\)](#)

# Exile and pride : disability, queerness and liberation

Author: [Eli Clare](#)

Publisher: Cambridge, MA : South End Press, ©2009.

Series: [South End Press classics, v.10.](#)

Edition/Format:  Book : Biography : English [View all editions and formats](#)

Database: WorldCat

Rating:  (not yet rated) [0 with reviews - Be the first.](#)

Subjects

[Clare, Eli.](#)

[Women political activists -- United States -- Biography.](#)

[Cerebral palsy -- United States -- Biography.](#)

1. Clare, Eli
2. Women political activists – United States – Biography
3. Cerebral palsy – United States – Biography



“What I...remember is opening the book...and noticing the subject headings and thinking, **‘What in the world is this? Have they really read the book?’** And moving on from there.”

- Inviting authors to engage
- Inadequacies in headings
- Genderqueer analysis

- Inviting authors to engage
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“Rather than being like, ‘Oh yeah, I saw them, they don't make sense, whatever’...your asking the questions made me think...and be like, ‘Oh, I can have an opinion about this.’”

“I either wasn't paying attention during copy editing, or I did pay attention but felt that this was a realm that I **had no authority over**. And I clearly remember that initial sense of dismay and then just moving on.”

Talking with authors?

“...she discusses the subject headings assigned to the book *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* with the author, Eli Clare. **That is unique, so far as I know**, and makes me want to consider doing the same with some authors I know”

- James Weinheimer, originally posted on Autocat listerv April 2013, available at First Thurs blog

- Inviting authors to engage
- Inadequacies in headings
- Genderqueer analysis



1. Clare, Eli
2. Women political activists – United States – Biography
3. Cerebral palsy – United States – Biography

“There's a way in which *Women political activists* as a heading in 1999 made some sense, although in 2011, because I now live in the world as a white guy, **that heading makes much less sense.** I'm not upset by having that piece of history connected to my work.”

**“Have you read the book about what I'm saying about the gender binary?”**

1. Clare, Eli
2. Women political activists – United States – Biography
3. Cerebral palsied – United States – Biography

**“The book is such a mix of memoir with political theory and thinking, and analysis with some history, with some political diatribe or polemic”**

1. Clare, Eli
2. Women political activists – United States – Biography
3. Cerebral palsy – United States – Biography

“The book about disability being reduced or compressed into what is a medical diagnosis, something the doctors have said about my body ... To have **all that politics and culture and history reduced to cerebral palsy** was like a big, ‘What have you done and why have you done it?’”

1. Clare, Eli
2. Women political activists – United States – Biography
3. Cerebral palsy – United States – Biography



**“In terms of the subject headings as a way of searching, who is going to search under, not cerebral palsy, but cerebral palsied?”**

1. Clare, Eli
2. Women political activists –  
United States – Biography
3. Cerebral palsy – United  
States – Biography

Queerness?

“I cannot believe that in your record, it is a[n] oversight but a conscious omission. The question is: why? I can imagine three possible reasons:

- the cataloger did not have enough time to add another subject heading
- the cataloger did not want to add the subject heading
- **as a cataloger suggested to me (off-line): fear.”**

- James Weinheimer, originally posted on Autocat listerv April 2013, available at First Thurs blog

- Inviting authors to engage
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“One of the things that I often say when I do transgender awareness work is that...there's so much evidence to suggest that humans are such creatures of categorization”

“No system is going to reflect the whole range of ways of existing, being, and naming. Just to have that knowledge go into...that particular system is going to help - **figuring out what category systems reflect more of the whole range rather than less of the whole range.**”

“How can we create a category system that acknowledges that it won't encompass everything easily or well, and how do you build into the system **what falls outside, what falls on the lines?** ... Do we punish them, do we embrace them, do we let the category system flex for them, do we gatekeep, do we silence, do we celebrate?”

- **Inviting authors to engage**

- Formally, informally, in research
- During editing process through publishers?

- **Inadequacies in headings**

- One of many examples

- **Genderqueer analysis**

- Useful framework



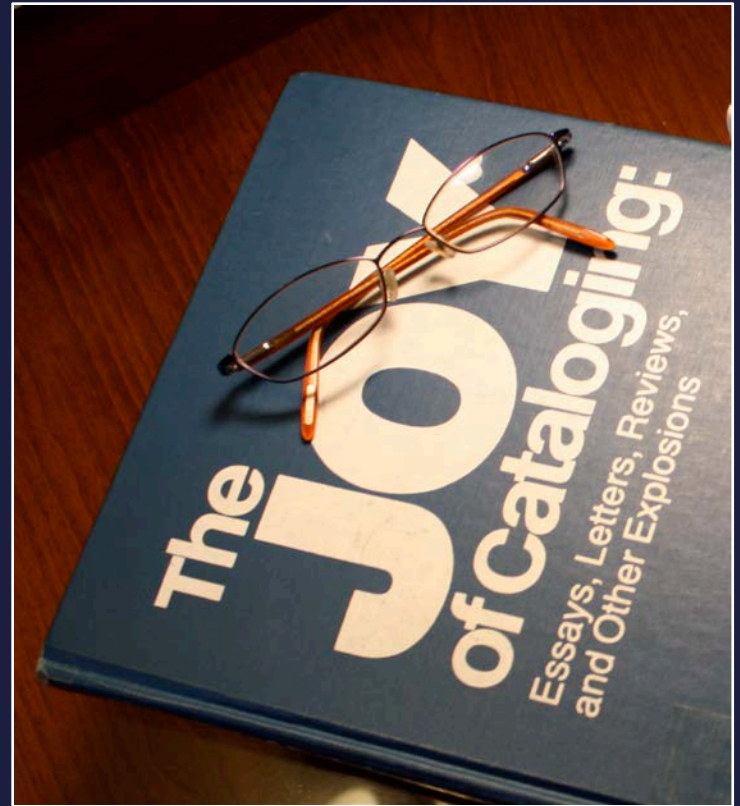
# Thank you!

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[@ameliarator](#)



# Selected critiques of subject access standards

## Arranged chronologically

Berman, S. (1971). *Prejudices and antipathies: A tract on the LC Subject Heads concerning people*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press.

Davis, E. A., & Davis, C. M. (1980). *Mainstreaming library service for disabled people*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press.

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Olson, H. A. (2002). *The power to name: Locating the limits of subject representation in libraries*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.

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Roberto, K. R. (Ed.). (2008). *Radical cataloging: Essays at the front*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co.

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Billey, A., Drabinski, E., & Roberto, K. R. (2014). What's gender got to do with it? A critique of RDA 9.7. *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 52(4), 412–421.