

**DISCUSSION TOPIC:** *Reflect on the definitions of “metadata” in Lesson 1 and the Karen Coyle chapter from Week One. For this week’s discussion post, read this week’s required readings (Macpherson and Cole) and answer the following questions: What is the “data” in each article? What is the “metadata”? According to these articles, how can the addition or exclusion of metadata impact our lives and/or preserve memory? What are the ethical implications of this addition or exclusion? Please reference the required readings in your post and don’t forget to respond to a classmate’s post as well.*

The data in Cole's article is two parts: the original, physical photos and their digitized versions from Zun Lee's collection of Polaroid photos, called "Fade Resistance". Though not explicitly written out, the way that Cole describes the photos in Lee's collection provides us with kind of local metadata (with some Dublin Core influence) that could look like this:

- Identifier: [Photo Number]
- Type: Still Image
- Format: Polaroid Photo
- Collection Name: Fade Resistance
- Description: Details about what is depicted

In instances where there is contextual evidence of time, place, or person, subject and coverage field may be applicable. It seems likely that Lee's own system of cataloging is rooted in his personal context and meaning that connects the photos together.

Macpherson's article discusses an array of inherited data, most specifically a physical photograph of a person hung from a tree in Samoa, which he titles "Hanging in Samoa". There is a handwritten note on the back of the image that Macpherson refers to as metadata, and I'd call that a description. The metadata for this photo, without further research, could look like this:

- Title: Hanging in Samoa
- Type: Still Image
- Format: Printed Photograph
- Coverage: Samoa
- Description: First and only case of lynching in Samoa. Corcoran lynched after being found guilty of wilful murder.
- Subject: Corcoran

Macpherson goes on to detail his experience searching for information about the content of the photo, which unearthed two separate news clippings about the incident photographed and are both useful in adding detail to the photo's metadata and call into question the accuracy of the handwritten description. Most importantly, Macpherson's story demonstrates the power of data capture, ownership, and interpretation on the prevailing historical narrative.

Metadata is foundational to the mechanisms that enable people to store and locate data, and as it is created by humans it carries the same biases that we do. The use of a controlled vocabulary can compound this bias- there are some really excellent papers on critical cataloging and critical librarianship that examine the foundations of commonly used subject headings, including the Library of Congress, and discuss their exclusionary impacts. Because metadata is meant to enable identification, discovery, and access to resources, and because metadata standards and choice of vocabulary are critical to the consistency that make metadata schemes effective, it's important as LIS students and professionals that we identify not only who is included and who is excluded in the language and metadata we use, but also how metadata can replicate and perpetuate bias and racist narratives.

I'm really into critical studies and could write at length, but to stay on topic with the ethical implications of addition or exclusion of metadata and how it impacts individuals' lives and collective memory, I think it's important to remember that data like these photographs is about real people, and images like Macpherson's lynching photo capture violence that has personal and generational impact to the person depicted. When an image becomes part of a collection and is assigned metadata, the metadata determines the context in which it will be found and understood by people who do not have a personal connection to it, and it can distance us from the human impact of the information we uncover. On a larger level, metadata can impact what is actually findable and include or erase data from historical narrative. Responsible use of metadata, from choice of elements to their values, is important to the integrity of our knowledge and memory institutions.