# Using Metadata Describing Appalachian Materials as Data for Reparative Archival Redescription Projects

Elizabeth D. James

Archivist and Digital Preservation Librarian

Marshall University

# What is metadata?

- Metadata is a word that recursively describes the phenomenon of data used to describe data.

- Metadata can include the title or author of a book or pamphlet. For digital documents, metadata might include authors that contributed comments, dates a document was edited, and more.
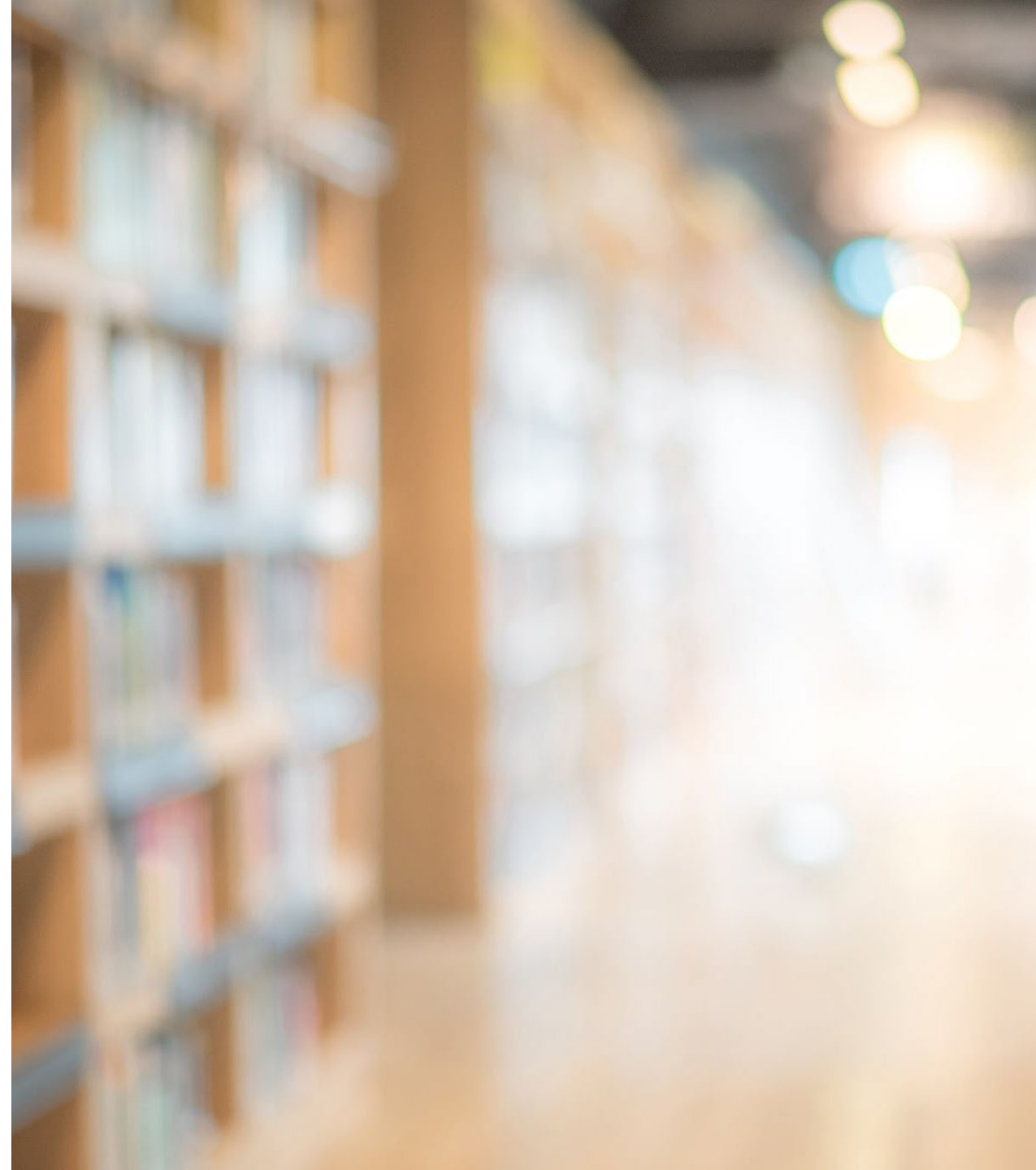
# Where does metadata come from?

Organizations charged with creating and maintaining metadata standards.

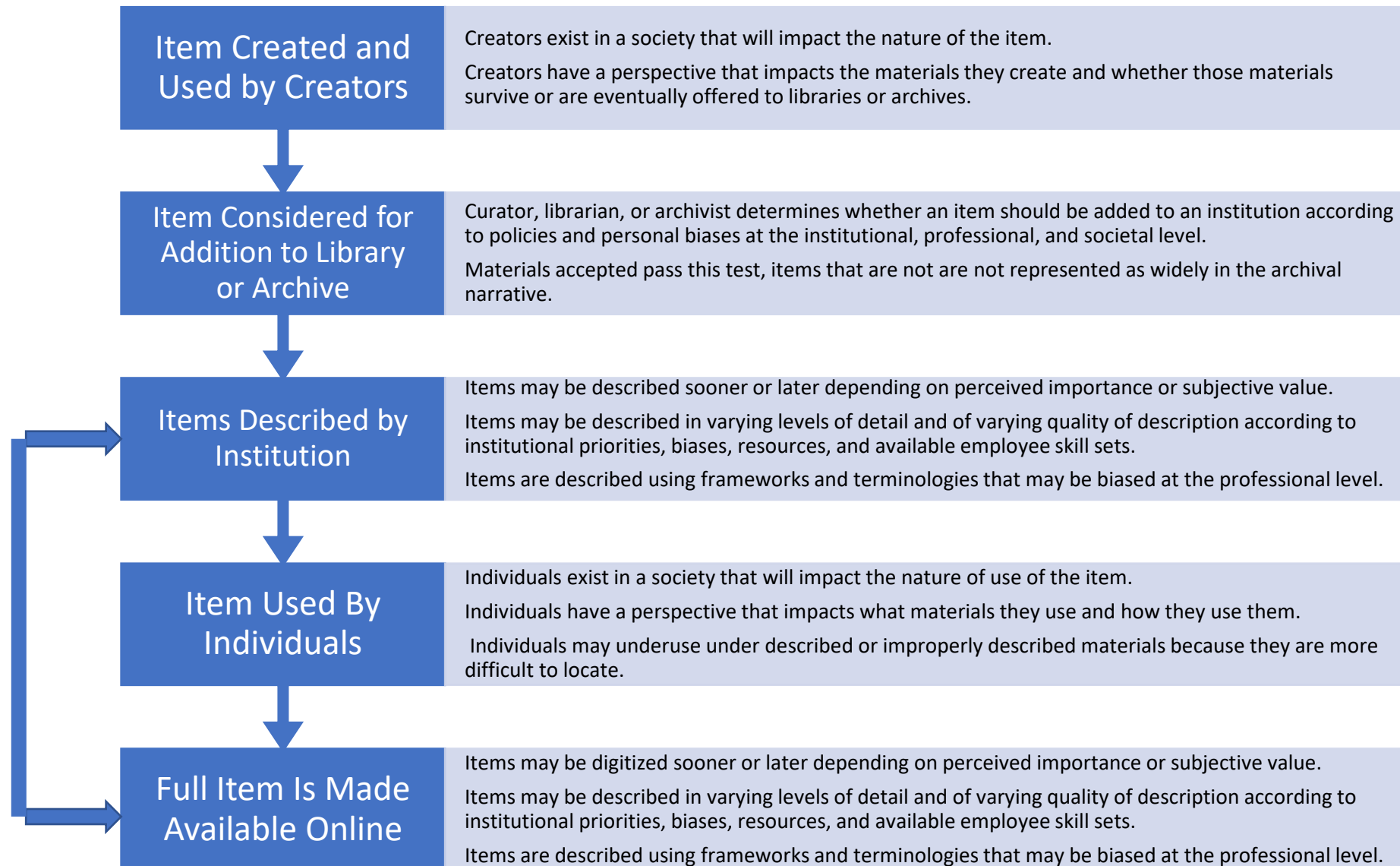Organizations charged with creating and maintaining controlled vocabularies.

Librarians and archivists who describe materials using these standards and vocabularies.

Metadata can also be automatically generated by interacting with electronic documents and resources.

# Opportunities for Bias in Libraries and Archives

| | |
|---|---|
| **Item Created and Used by Creators** | Creators exist in a society that will impact the nature of the item. |
| | Creators have a perspective that impacts the materials they create and whether those materials survive or are eventually offered to libraries or archives. |
| **Item Considered for Addition to Library or Archive** | Curator, librarian, or archivist determines whether an item should be added to an institution according to policies and personal biases at the institutional, professional, and societal level. |
| | Materials accepted pass this test, items that are not are not represented as widely in the archival narrative. |
| **Items Described by Institution** | Items may be described sooner or later depending on perceived importance or subjective value. |
| | Items may be described in varying levels of detail and of varying quality of description according to institutional priorities, biases, resources, and available employee skill sets. |
| | Items are described using frameworks and terminologies that may be biased at the professional level. |
| **Item Used By Individuals** | Individuals exist in a society that will impact the nature of use of the item. |
| | Individuals have a perspective that impacts what materials they use and how they use them. |
| | Individuals may underuse under described or improperly described materials because they are more difficult to locate. |
| **Full Item Is Made Available Online** | Items may be digitized sooner or later depending on perceived importance or subjective value. |
| | Items may be described in varying levels of detail and of varying quality of description according to institutional priorities, biases, resources, and available employee skill sets. |
| | Items are described using frameworks and terminologies that may be biased at the professional level. |

# Professional and Cultural Bias: Library of Congress Subject Headings

## Appalachians (People)

**Variants**
- Appalachian people
- Mountain whites (Southern States)

**Broader Terms**
- Ethnology--Appalachian Region
- Mountain people--Southern States

**Closely Matching Concepts from Other Schemes**
- Appalachians (People)

**Narrower Concepts from Other Schemes**
- Appalachians (People)--Ethnic identity
- Appalachians (People)--Social conditions
- Appalachians (People)--Social life and customs

**Earlier Established Forms**
- Mountain whites (Southern States)

**Sources**
- found: Encyc. of Southern Culture, 1989("Appalachians" ... pictured as proud, fiercely independent .... conversely ... as fighting and feuding ... ignorant degenerates downtrodden by centuries of isolation, inbreeding, and poverty)
- found: Encyc. of World Cultures, 1991("Appalachians" refers to a largely rural people who reside in the southern Appalachian region covering about 110,000 square miles in the states of Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama")
- found: Harvard Encyc. of Amer. Ethnic Groups, 1980(Appalachians lack the church organizations, distinct language, and racial characteristics that often define an ethnic group. What group consciousness they have comes from their distinctive kinship system, religion, dialect, and music.")
- found: Random House dict.(Appalachian, n.: a native or inhabitant of Appalachia, esp. one of predominantly Scotch-Irish, English, or German ancestry who exemplifies the characteristic cultural traditions of this region.)
- found: Encarta world Eng. dict.(Appalachian, n.: somebody from Appalachia)

# Institutional Bias Through Lack of Expertise and Cultural Competency: University Library Cataloging

**Author**    Fiene, Judith Ivy, 1936-

**Title**    The social reality of a group of rural, low-status, Appalachian women : a grounded theory study / Judith Ivy Fiene.

**Publication Info.**    New York : Garland, ©1993.
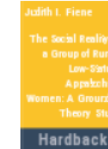
| Location | Call Number | Message Info | Status |
|---|---|---|---|
| Special Collections/West Virginia | HQ1438.T2 F54 1993 | --- | AVAILABLE |

## Summary

Examines and analyzes the attitudes of 18 women in rural Tennessee about themselves, their lives, and other elements of society. The findings should be of interest to social workers dealing with low-status people. Annotation c. by Book News, Inc., Portland, Or.

## Details

**Description**    xiii, 104 pages ; 24 cm.

**Series**    Children of poverty
        Children of poverty.

**Bibliography**    Includes bibliographical references (pages 91-99) and index.

**Contents**    Ch. 1. Conceptual Framework -- Statement of Problem -- The Social Construction of Reality -- Social Stratification -- Nominalist Perspective of Class/Status -- Appalachian Region -- Self-Concept -- Ch. 2. Social Status and Family Patterns -- Social Status and Social Reality -- Life Patterns in Low-Status Groups -- Rural Life Patterns -- Poverty in Rural Appalachia -- Social Stratification in Appalachia -- Low-Status Appalachian Women -- Ch. 3. Research Methods -- Study Site -- Selection of Participants -- Data Analysis -- Limitations of the Study -- Ch. 4. Family Roles and Expectations -- Female Roles -- Male Roles -- Male-Female Relationships -- Role Failures -- Socialization to World Outside of Family -- Ch. 5. Social Relationships -- Awareness of Social Status -- Interactional Expectations -- Dealing with Feeling Put-Down -- Ch. 6. Feelings About Self -- Self-Esteem and Family Role Performance -- Negative Feelings About Self -- Endurance and the Little Things in Life -- Ch. 7. Summary and Implications.

**Subject**    Rural women -- Tennessee -- Cocke County.
        Poor women -- Tennessee -- Cocke County.
        Women -- Tennessee -- Cocke County -- Social conditions.
        Cocke County (Tenn.) -- Rural conditions.

**ISBN**    0815311168 (alk. paper) : $35.00

# Institutional Bias Through Resource Scarcity: University Archives and Special Collections

Accession Number: 1982/01.0370

Name of Collection: Richard O. Comfort Papers

Inventory Completed By: K█████ N█████

Date Completed: 06/30/16

Location: Marshall University Special Collection's Department

Scope and Content:

Marshall University professor of sociology and anthropology; papers consist primarily of secondary material regarding rural sociology and Appalachian topics.

Box 1

    Misc.

    "A Study of Radio Advertising "

    "An Explanation of The Recreation Problem"

    "The Feasibility Industrial Development in the Pikeville Area"

Box 2

    Misc

| | |
|---|---|
| Folder 1 | Appalachian Studies- Southern |
| Folder 2 | Ft. Gay Study |
| Folder 3 | Fort Gay Paper |
| Folder 4 | Commission on Religion in Appalachian |
| Folder 5 | American Protestant Seminaries |
| Folder 6 | Van Royan & Moryadas "Tu Economic Geosruphic Basis of Appalachia's Problems" |
| Folder 7 | Institute for Regional Development Ohio U. |
| Folder 8 | Problems of Poverty in the U.S.A. |
| Folder 9 | Maps |
| Folder 10 | Bibliography |
| Folder 11 | The Southern Appalachian Region |
| Books | |

# We need to do better.

There are decades of imprecise, inadequate, and harmful description to not only fix, but acknowledge and document.

We must find a way to address issues ethically and at scale—it took decades to create these records, and taking decades isn't an acceptable timeline for fixing them.

Our community of users deserve better than a simple "find and replace" approach. They deserve an approach that is conscientious and thoughtful.

# How do we get there?

Determine what materials are minimally described and pertain to historically marginalized groups that are already extant in our collections using a combination of manual and automated techniques.
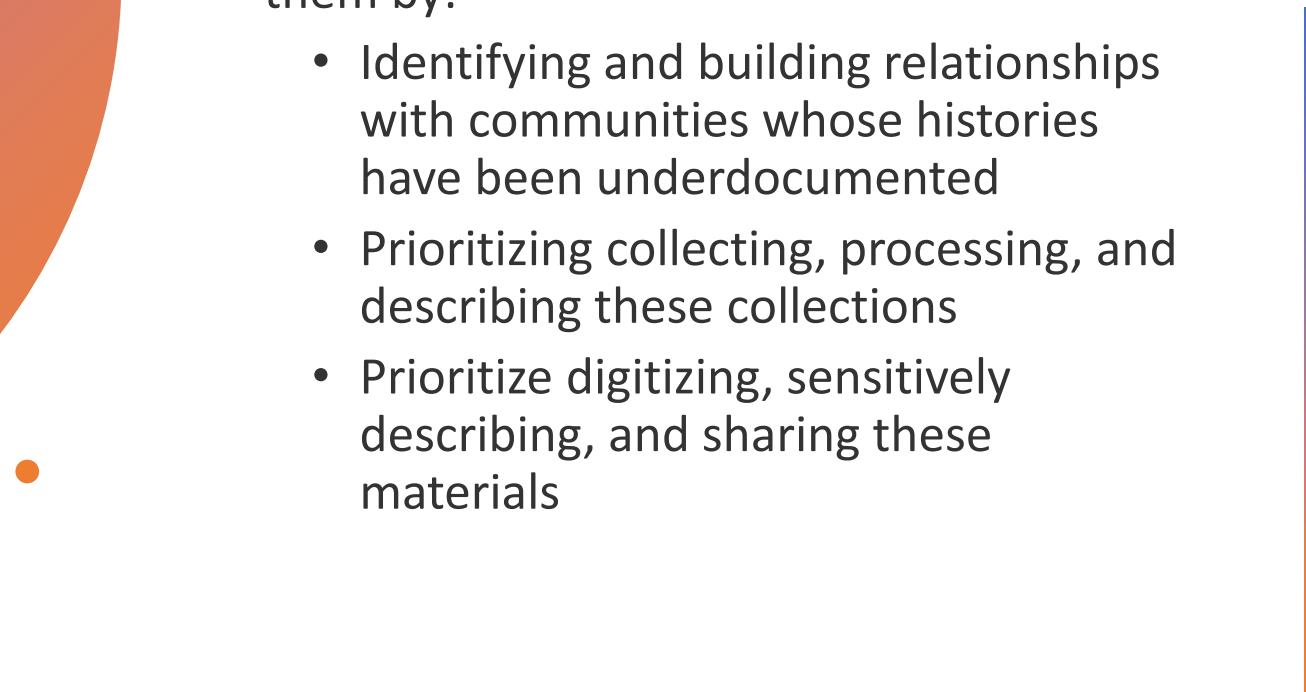
Audit the metadata describing these materials. To do this in a way that does not perpetuate harm, librarians and archivists must possess a bias-aware and social justice focused mindset.

Automated methods for identification mixed with manual and automated editing approaches will allow librarians and archivists to make the field of Appalachian studies more accessible and inclusive.

# Case Study:
# Marshall University Archives and Special Collections Digitized Materials

- To convert theory into praxis, this summer I will work with the circa 10,000 digitized photographs and 600 finding aids describing archival collections to conduct an audit into Marshall's legacy descriptive practices at a larger scale.

- By examining our current collections and how they are described, we will be able to examine the archival silences and address them by:
  - Identifying and building relationships with communities whose histories have been underdocumented
  - Prioritizing collecting, processing, and describing these collections
  - Prioritize digitizing, sensitively describing, and sharing these materials

# Case Study:
Marshall University Archives and Special Collections Digitized Materials

- The project will be documented to make the work shareable and usable by institutions with varying levels of resources—whether it's a local historical society or larger university archive, it's critical that institutions have access to this work to make the field of Appalachian studies and the use of resources describing Appalachian people and subjects more approachable.

Did you find this interesting or relevant to your own research?

Let's talk more!

You can find me at:
jamese@marshall.edu
elizabethjames.net