

A Proposed Study on the Effects of Prioritizing Diverse Material in a Public Library's Book Displays

Abstract

Public libraries are committed to providing materials to all people to enhance their informational needs. With the continued growth of diversity within our communities, libraries must continually develop collections to satisfy the demands of more culturally diverse groups. Also, libraries must create ways to promote diverse materials to patrons to develop more consistent opportunities for access. **The extent of the study evaluates if consistent representation of diverse groups within a year-round display significantly increases the circulation of culturally diverse books and materials through a mixed-methods approach.** The study also utilizes survey results of users and their intended purposes for materials selection combined with circulation analysis to determine correlation and causation of intended events.

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Statement of Need & Significance of Study

Needs Assessment

Public libraries have a mission to promote a love of lifelong learning while providing individuals opportunities to connect and engage within a safe and respectful environment. Public libraries provide access to quality materials to enhance the educational and informational needs of the communities they serve. However, many libraries often focus on displaying diverse books for brief periods throughout the year. Specific displays of books and materials during monthly celebrations like Black History Month, Asian Pacific American Month, National Hispanic Month, and American Indian Heritage Month are commonplace around specific times of the calendar year. **Public libraries must develop a way to provide consistent access to diverse materials to address the issue of getting quality materials representing all cultural groups to the patrons who desire to utilize them. In order to provide access to quality materials representative of all cultural groups on a continual basis, public libraries need to develop a more conducive access strategy to implement and evaluate.**

Literature Review

Research shows that materials displayed in high-traffic areas of libraries circulate more frequently than items that are not displayed. There is a gap in the current library science research regarding diverse book displays and increased circulation. Much of the research focuses on how displaying books positively affects their circulation statistics, but diverse books are not the primary focus of the research. In addition, most of the studies are from the 1980's and 90's and focus on adult collections, not on diverse authors or subject matter.

A 2014 study at BYU traces the effects of highlighting the library's business and economics collection by creating book displays for these materials. The study concluded that book displays increased the usage of the items displayed fifty eight percent per year (Camacho, et al., 2014). The study also highlights the need for

further research to include other disciplines, and to account for e-book usage. Finally, this study also underscores the need for “librarians to use targeted promotional tools like book displays to encourage browsing of their collections” (Camacho, et al., 2014).

Similar to the previously highlighted study, a 1972 study tests the effect of placing 110 selected adult titles in prominent display locations in two public libraries. For the first six months the 110 titles were monitored without being put on display, and for the second six months the titles were placed in a prominent display location next to the circulation desk. The study found that the use of these titles increased when the materials were placed on display next to the circulation desk (Goldhor, 1972).

What is diversity? Life on Earth is diverse, communities are diverse, individuals are diverse. The Oxford English Dictionary defines diversity as “the condition or quality of being diverse, different, or varied”; the American Library Association’s Glossary of Terms defines diversity as “the sum of the ways that people are both alike and different,” and further recognizes “visible” (external) and “invisible” (internal) diversity. With a growing awareness of diversity in today’s population, empathy has become a critical aspect of interacting at work, school, or even the grocery store. Rowe (2018) proposed diverse literature has the potential to increase a reader’s empathy and “the effects that popular novels have on attitudes towards race, ethnicity, homosexuality, and refugees suggests that fiction can indeed be a positive force for addressing social issues and concerns.”

Smith and Schonfeld (2000) reviewed research studies about diversity on college campuses and found it has educational and social benefits, shows initiative and commitment of the institution, and highlights issues (rather than cause problems). “[E]xposure to multiple points of view on issues that matter and have some emotional significance” can lead to “increased commitment to civic engagement ... [and] community participation,” which in turn supports the “corporate, service, and nonprofit sectors of our society [that] express an urgent need for employees who are prepared to work in diverse environments and recognize the resulting benefits to the workplace of increased critical thinking and creativity skills” (Smith & Schonfeld, 2000, pp. 16-

20). Diversity is a broad topic that seeps into every facet of today's global society; beyond the limitation of college campuses is the more common arena of public libraries.

Aronson et al. reviewed messages and themes present in children's books with diverse characters in order to better define the nuances of representation. The authors conducted qualitative research to identify and define the themes present in order to measure the impact of the messages. They identified the following themes: Beautiful Life, Every Child, Biography, Folklore, Oppression, Cross-Group, Concept, Incidental, and Informational. The authors were able to gather the most information on the positive impact of Oppression, Cross-Group, and Beautiful Life books, however, not much research has been done on the impact of books of the remaining themes.

Libraries have an interest in providing and circulating diverse materials. The American Library Association states, "we value our nation's diversity and strive to reflect that diversity by providing a full spectrum of resources and services to the communities we serve" (American Library Association, 2017). Many studies have provided evidence that the inclusion of materials in highly-trafficked displays positively impacts the circulation of that material, but there is little literature that examined this phenomenon as it applies to the circulation of historically underrepresented perspectives. By analyzing the factors that motivate patrons to select culturally diverse materials that are included in a primarily located year-round display, this study aims to address this gap in the research. Quantitative data, collected from circulation statistics, will indicate any changes in the circulation of the selected materials during the study's time period. Qualitative data, collected through a survey and follow-up interview of patrons who check out a displayed item, will provide insight into why the patron selected that particular item, and help the researchers to understand if and how the display factored into their decision.

Significance of the Study

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As the diversity of our population continues to increase significantly, this ensures the need for public libraries and other archival institutions to provide equitable access to materials and resources to fulfill the needs of all communities served. **The literature reviewed indicates a lack of diversity present in public library collections, limited access to diverse materials, and an increase in circulation of specific library materials when promotional displays are utilized. This study will evaluate the circulation of culturally diverse books and materials by promoting them using a year-round display.** For purposes of the study, **the term diversity will be defined as representing people from a mix of different social and ethnic backgrounds to include Black or African American, Indigenous American and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, Asian, and two or more races.** The research is critical to maintain the core values of librarianship of equitable access to resources and diversity. Also, libraries have a commitment to sustainability by engaging in practices that are socially equitable (ALA, 2006). As the major provider of information sources and curator of access for society, the public library must promote diverse materials throughout the year to effectively represent and serve every member of the community.

Research goal

The studies included in the Literature Review provide evidence that book displays in libraries have a tangible impact on dramatically increasing the circulation of underutilized books. **The goal of this research project is to determine if that same success can be replicated when multicultural and diverse voices represent the materials being displayed. This study will analyze whether consistent representation of diverse voices in year-round book displays increases the circulation of these books in a statistically significant way and examine the factors that influence library patrons' choices.**

Research Questions

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This research proposal plans to implement a mixed research methods approach when collecting data, and as such, the research questions are split up into **A)** the quantitative data on circulation statistics and **B)** a qualitative survey/interview regarding the reasons for library user's selections.

A) Quantitative Question: Do placement of more diverse materials in year-round book displays positively impact the circulation of diverse books?

B) Qualitative Survey/Interview Questions: What are the motivations behind users' selections of diverse material?

Research Design

Methodology

This experiment will determine the effect of a year-round display on the circulation of selected diverse materials within the public library. It will also help to determine the motivating factors behind users' selections of diverse materials. **The study will take place at the LeRoy Collins Leon County Public Library (LCPL) in Tallahassee, Florida. The rationale for choosing this public library is due to the high number of library patrons passing through the branch daily, and multiple book/digital displays that are already being used for several topics.**

Furthermore, according to the most recent U.S. census data, there is a diverse makeup of inhabitants in Leon County: 61% white only, 32.4% Black or African American only, 0.4% American Indian and Alaska Native alone, 0.1% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone, 3.6% Asian alone, 7% Hispanic or Latino and 2.5% two or more races (U.S Census Bureau, 2020). Since the LCPL is a public library not restricted by academic or special collections status, the previously cited U.S. census data reflects the LCPL's patron demographics, which will be analyzed for the basis of this experiment. The voluntary survey that patrons will be asked to complete upon selection of the displayed materials will

include questions about the patron's age, gender identification, and ethnicity. When paired with open-ended questions about how successfully LCPL values, welcomes, and represents their culture, these demographic questions will provide valuable insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the collection and help LCPL better serve the entire community.

Regarding the type of sampling procedure, **this study will implement a single-stage sampling approach.** This approach will be used because the principal investigators will have direct access to the names of the population once the participants fill out the survey questionnaire. **The study will use convenience sampling, as it is unknown how many items in the diverse displays will be checked out by patrons.** Therefore, the sample will be chosen based on the availability of who will approach and check out items from the diverse displays, and later fill out the survey and/or follow up interview questions (Creswell & Creswell, p. 150).

The study will utilize a mixed-methods approach to ensure a more comprehensive analysis of the research phenomena. **Quantitative data will be obtained from circulation records of the diverse materials checked out over a period of 12 months through the integrated library system, SirsiDynix Workflows.** Qualitative data will be collected based on a survey of patrons' choices in making diverse materials selections for check-out and follow-up interviews. The same users who respond to the initial survey, given after they check out a diverse item, will then be contacted via phone or email to participate in a short follow-up interview, and compensated for their time with a \$10 Amazon gift card.

1. **Curate the selected materials:** the initial stage of the study would involve selection of 160 diverse materials, with a focus on cultural diversity that excludes white Christian perspectives.
2. **Collect control group circulation data:** We will gather circulation statistics for the selected items in the regular stacks, spanning a six-month period. This pre-test procedure will set the standard for the selected materials and represent the control group.

3. **Create and promote “Celebrate the Cultural Diversity in Our World” display:** A physical display with colorful backgrounds and book stands will be used to promote the selected culturally diverse items. **In addition to the physical display, virtual displays will appear on the library's website and on monitors throughout the library.** The display will host 10 culturally diverse items and maintain at least a 70% fullness throughout the year. **The items will include a mixture of fiction, non-fiction, audiobooks, DVDs, and music CD selections.** Markers with instructions will be placed in the original stacks to direct patrons to locate the selected item(s) on the display.
4. **Qualitative research collection:** During a six-month period with a post-test or independent group of selected items, using the promotional treatment of the display, **survey patrons who have checked out items from the display. Conduct follow-up interviews with patrons who respond that they would like to participate.**
5. **Collect new circulation data:** After the intervention period, in which the selected diverse materials will be promoted in physical and virtual displays, we will pull new circulation data.
6. **Analyze the quantitative and qualitative results:** Once the study period is complete, we will compare the circulation data of the control group against the circulation data that is pulled post-experiment, and determine what, if any, changes occurred in the circulation of the selected materials during the 6 month display period. To better understand why patrons chose to check out one of the materials included in the display, and how the display did or did not impact their choice, we will analyze the survey and interview responses.

Data Collection Methods

Before the study period begins, librarians will select 160 items of culturally diverse materials from the collection and designate their participation with a circulation note in SirsiDynix Workflows. For the initial six-

month period, the selected books will remain in the stacks. **Control statistics will be pulled and analyzed to assess how these materials circulate. At the close of the experiment period, after these materials have been introduced to the variable of being highlighted in the library's "Celebrate the Cultural Diversity in Our World" display, new circulation data will be pulled for this period, compared to the control statistics, and analyzed. These statistics will provide quantitative data about the circulation of the selected materials.**

The study must recognize that other factors besides the display impact the circulation of material, so the results cannot rely exclusively on quantitative circulation statistics to determine the display's success. Qualitative information, provided by a survey and follow-up interview, will close the gap in understanding the factors that prompt a patron to choose one item over another. When a patron checks out material that has been flagged, a bookmark included with the item will contain a QR code that will direct the patron to fill out an electronic survey or procure a paper survey from the reference desk. The survey provides insights into the patron's demographics, why they selected that material, and requests permission for a follow-up interview, either by phone, email, or in-person.

The survey and interview will provide qualitative information about why a patron checked out a selected title, and if or how the display impacted their choice. The groundwork of research included in the Literature Review provides evidence that library displays positively impact the circulation of under-utilized collections. **Based upon these findings, the anticipated outcome of this study is that inclusion of culturally diverse materials in a prominent, long-term library display will dramatically increase their circulation, popularize awareness of the collection within the community, and potentially increase the amount of culturally diverse materials.**

Project Resources

Personnel- Eileen Anderson, Lori Capar, Wilfred Cole, Alex Hornak, Danielle Janney, and Michael Reff are all principal investigators for this research proposal. They are Masters of Library and Information Science (MLIS) students in the University of South Florida's online program. They are **each responsible for the construction of this proposal as well as the implementation of the methodology, collection and analysis of data, and for efficiently liaising with additional project members.**

In addition to the principal investigator team, members of the LeRoy Collins Public Library (LCPL) that will work closely with the display materials conducted in this methodology are also included. First and foremost is the **Library Director** Stacy Chase, who will have to approve access to her library for the purposes of this experiment. Furthermore, **Learning and Workforce Services Manager** Maxwell Henson is a pivotal part of the planning process in both adult and youth services' issues, so he will also be key to the implementation of this experiment. Then there are the actual staff from the Adult Services department at LCPL that will deal with the book displays themselves by rotating out materials and promoting the displays, : Librarians (aka **Information Professionals** each possessing MLIS degrees) Jim Swanson, Teri Fletcher, and Susan Kopf, **Library Special Service Coordinators** John Spector and Margaret Branch , and one **Library Services Specialist** Regina Kohn (she coordinates the book display schedule, thus will have to be spoken with frequently to work on which of the displays the PI team will use). Finally, the circulation staff of **Library Services Assistants** Linda Price and Glenda Danning will assist patrons in checking out of the book display materials to make sure the statistics are recorded.

Timeline –

| Date | Activity |
|------|----------|
|------|----------|

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| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Jan 2, 2023 - Jan 13, 2023 | Curating the selected materials |
| Jan 16, 2023 - July 16, 2023 | Collecting control group circulation data |
| July 17, 2023 - Jan 19, 2024 | Promoting the display and collecting qualitative research |
| Jan 22, 2024 - Feb 2, 2024 | Analyzing the quantitative and qualitative results |

Budget- The primary expenditure for this project is the library's staff time in analyzing the circulation numbers and conducting the surveys with patrons. Materials for this project include the use of the SirsiDynix Workflows (for circulation numbers), the library's email address for distribution of the and collection of the patron survey, the library's social media team for marketing and assistance with the digital library displays, materials for the colorful physical display "Celebrating the Cultural Diversity in Our World," and 100 ten-dollar Amazon gift cards to compensate the patrons that agree to the follow up interview. A couple of these materials will require additional funds, the colorful physical display for the diverse materials and the 100 Amazon gift cards. The head of reference will have each reference employee spend one hour a week assisting with this research project.

| Salaries | Expenses | Comments |
|---------------------------|-----------------|---|
| Library Assistants 1 FTE | \$3,900 | \$15/hr; 5 assistants @ 1 hour a week each |
| Library Assistants .5 FTE | 2,340 | \$15/hr; 3 assistants @ 1 hour a week each |
| Benefits | | |
| Library Assistants 1 FTE | 1,170 | 30% FICA |
| Library Assistants .5 FTE | 179 | 7.65% FICA |
| Library Materials | | |
| 160 books & media | | Diverse material selected from collection |
| Supplies | | |
| Display materials | 1,000 | |
| Amazon gift cards | 1,000 | 100 \$10 gift cards |
| Paper | 20 | Bookmarks & physical surveys |
| Printer ink/toner | 50 | " " |
| Equipment | | |
| Computers | | Canva for bookmark & poster design; qr-code-generator.com; SirsiDynix Workflows |
| Printer | | Bookmarks & physical surveys |
| Paper cutter | | Bookmarks |
| Displays | | Preexisting shelves and monitors in public area |

| | | |
|-------|---------|--|
| Total | \$9,659 | |
|-------|---------|--|

Appendix

Public Library Survey

The team at the LeRoy Collins Leon County Public Library (LCPL) is investigating the effect that book displays have on the circulation of diverse materials housed in the library. The goal of this survey is to collect data to determine if year-round diverse material displays significantly increase the circulation numbers of these diverse materials. The first part of the survey contains questions that investigate the motivations behind our patrons' selection of diverse materials. The second part of the survey is concerned with collecting demographic data about our patrons and can be omitted if they do not feel comfortable answering these questions. The third part of the survey asks our patrons if they want to partake in a voluntary interview follow-up.

Section 1

Motivation of User Selection

1. How well does the library welcome and value you and your culture? Please circle 1 being your poorest choice and 5 being your highest choice selection. Also, feel free to add any additional comments to support your selection.

1 2 3 4 5

2. Do you feel that your culture is well represented by the library's collection? Please circle your choice. Also, feel free to add any additional comments to support your selection.

Yes

No

3. If you circled no for Question 2, what authors or kind of books would you like to see more of?

4. Please list the book(s) or material(s) you selected from the display.

5. How did you find out about the book or material you selected? Please circle all that apply.

Library Display

Library Social Media

Other Social Media

TV/Magazine

Friend or Family Member

Best Seller's List

Other _____

6. If you selected library display from Question 4 above, what element(s) of the display prompted your choice? Please circle your response.

Visibility and prominent location of the item(s)

Display theme/topic of interest

Attracted by display colors and/or item arrangement

Other (please specify why the display motivated you to check out your item(s))

Section 2

Demographic Information

7. What is your age? Please circle your choice.

Under 18

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65-74

74+

8. What gender do you identify as? Please circle your choice

Female

Male

Non-binary

Transgender

Prefer not to answer

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Other

9. Please specify your ethnicity

African-American

Asian

Indigenous American

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Latino or Hispanic

Caucasian

Two or More

Other/Unknown

Prefer not to answer

10. Where were you born?

North America/Central America

South America

Europe

Africa

Asia

Australia

Caribbean/Pacific Islands

Other:_____

Prefer not to answer

Section 3

Voluntary Interview Follow-Up

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11. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview? Please circle your choice.

Yes

No

12. If you answered yes to Question 10 above, please enter your contact information: Name and Phone or Email.

13. Did you know what type of item you were going to borrow before you came to the library? Circle your choice.

Yes

No

14. Rate the titles included in the library's cultural display. Please circle your choice.

0-1: Very Poor

1-2: Poor

2-3: Average

3-4: Good

5: Excellent

Other (Please include any additional comments on the display titles)

Thank you for your responses. Your participation will help our library provide the best selection of materials possible to satisfy patrons' interests and needs.

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Member Contributions:

All members contributed to brainstorming for topic and researching lit review sources.

██████████ -Research Goal, Research Design, Edited Draft 3 based upon Draft 2 feedback, contributed to References. Presentation: Research Goal, Research Questions, Works Cited.

██████████ Needs Assessment (Research Problem), Significance of Study, Research Design, Draft Edits, Designed paper and online surveys, Abstract, Needs Assessment & Lit Review Part 1 for Presentation

██████████ - Lit Review, Cover Page, Research. Assisted with methodology and data collection methods, clean-up of draft.

██████████ Draft 1 Research Questions- Draft 2 –participated in brainstorming, wrote description of population, sampling approach, organized meetings, contributed to References, and team representative, wrote Personnel portion of Draft 3 and edited a little of Survey, Methodology slides and some voice over for E-presentation

██████████ – can help with anything that needs assistance

Danielle Janney— Lit Review: Diversity, Reference Clean-up, Research Design, mechanics of data collection