

Perpetuating Whiteness: Disrupting the Dominant Narrative in Academic Library Collections

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ABSTRACT: This exploratory study addresses both the lack of collection diversity and inclusion in the humanities and social sciences collection of a large, state university located in a rural part of the American Pacific Northwest and highlights the need for more awareness of whiteness within library collections. The initial study found that 78% of recently acquired monographs were grounded in a Eurocentric perspective and that the represented authors were predominantly white and/or male. Even though professional library organizations recognize the critical need and responsibility to foster a culture of diversity and inclusion, an argument can be made that academic libraries reproduce the inequities and hegemonic states of their parent institutions in their acquisitions, perpetuating a white-embedded structure of knowledge. When viewed through a lens of critical race theory (CRT), it is apparent that although academic libraries tout missions to ensure diversity and inclusive practices, there is a lack of oversight in assuring collections are capturing underrepresented and culturally appreciative works of thought, ideologies, and perspectives that are not based in white epistemological “truths.”

Keywords: Academic Library Collections; Inclusive Collections; Collection Diversity; Systemic Racism; Authentic Authorship



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“The idea of equal access is fundamental to American democracy... But when a society is stratified into poles of advantage and disadvantage, with the inevitable consequences of privilege and exclusion, the promise of equal access to the discourses necessary for democratic participation rings hollow.” (Kranich, 2005, para. 2)

Introduction

Libraries in the United States have had a complicated history with equality and social justice, from the pre-Civil Rights era to today. The United States has always been a multiracial and multicultural nation-state. Historical racism and discrimination, coupled with recent developments in society, legislation, and the world, point to an urgent need for more inclusion and more diversity. Libraries have recognized this need and strive to empower and contribute to a culture that fosters inclusion. In an effort to better understand “the societal value of diverse populations and the contributions they make to our cultural heritage” (Hastings, 2015, p.135), U.S. library associations have committed to efforts to include diverse voices in the recruitment of librarians, patronage, accessibility, and collections. Libraries have made these commitments even in the face of an increasing lack of support and funding.

However, libraries never function quite so simply. Viewed through the lens of critical race theory (CRT), many academic libraries fail in their intent to empower and legitimize underrepresented and marginalized communities. A CRT lens looks at narratives of events, people, and their participation, recognizing historically underrecognized *and* unrecognized people and their participation in those events. Still, persons from historically underrecognized *and* unrecognized groups do not walk into libraries where the collections embrace their authentic histories and voices. Rather, they are often met with spaces where white authors have co-opted their voices, where their histories and cultures have been rewritten to perpetuate white history, the Western literary canon, and a Eurocentric curriculum (Zamudio et al., 2010).

This study analyzes a sample selection from the humanities and social sciences physical monograph collection at a major research university library in the Pacific Northwest, one committed to diversity in its mission statements, in order to determine the extent to which diversity is reflected in the acquisition of materials for the collection. This mid-sized university (~30,000 students in total) has six campuses across the state, with the flagship campus located in a small, relatively rural town. It is a traditional college town in that the university is the major employer of the area. The overall university is predominately white, with only 9,500 students of color in the overall system.

As a white, employed, faculty librarian who has had access to higher education, and is a part of the higher education system, it is from a place of privilege that I can write this article. The intention behind this article is to add to, but not exploit in any way, the conversation on the oppression of marginalized communities, and speak out about those institutions and organizations that are reinforcing oppressive power structures. Ultimately, this article is intended to bring awareness to the true underrepresentation of marginalized and historically resilient cultures within our library collections; in turn, these collections perpetuate a Eurocentric, hegemonic structure of knowledge. The language throughout this paper reflects national data, both of which are inherently

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problematic in their racial and gendered categorizations (Alim, 2016; Chun, 2016; Collins, 2018a; Lenning, 2009; Lynn & Dixson, 2013; Rushton, et. al, 2019; Zamudio, et. al, 2010). There is a need for research that acknowledges a variety of gender identities and experiences; however, at this time national data are limited to bifurcated language, which is reflected in this paper. When possible, I use neutral/expansive language that reflects authors' pronouns as directed/stated.

Diversity Goals and Demographics

Multiple U.S. library associations have made substantial statements on the value of diversity. The American Library Association's (ALA) newly adopted 2022 Code of Ethics is designed to guide librarians from all types of libraries in making ethical decisions regarding service, collections, and equitability/accessibility to all patrons. One of the nine key action areas that has been adopted by ALA (2022) is to "...recognize and dismantle systemic and individual biases; to confront inequity and oppression; to enhance diversity and inclusion; and to advance racial and social justices in our libraries, communities, profession, and associations through awareness, advocacy, education, collaboration, services, and allocation of resources and spaces" (para. 1).

However, as Winston (2008) asserts in their evaluation of diversity efforts within the library profession, the efforts of most libraries to diversify have come to be focused on personnel representation, "and less so on issues related to the design and provision of products and services" (p. 132). Despite this earlier focus on diverse hires within librarianship, currently over 83% of all librarians in the United States are white (Department for Professional Employees [DPE], 2021).

It is important to understand the various population communities that academic libraries serve. Although student enrollment in higher education has increased in the past 10 years for both males and females, the majority of students in the 2020-2021 academic year were female – 58% of undergraduate and 61% postbaccalaureate (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021b). Furthermore, the percentage of students of color has been increasing, but still remains predominantly white with 53% of postsecondary students identifying as white (NCES, 2021a).

The faculty has not diversified as much as the student body; those in faculty positions are not reflective of the overall diverse U.S. population and are heavily skewed in favor of white people. In fall 2020, there were approximately 1.5 million faculty members in postsecondary institutions, 56% of whom were full-time faculty. Of these full-time faculty members, nearly three-quarter were white: 39% were white males and 35% were white females (NCES, 2021d). The remaining faculty were 7% Asian/Pacific Islander males, 5% Asian/Pacific Islander females; 4% were Black females; and 3% each were Black males, Hispanic males, and Hispanic females. Those who identified as American Indian/Alaska Native and two or more races each made up 1% or less of full-time faculty (NCES, 2021d). NCES (2021c) also reported that in fall 2020, 92.8% of postsecondary educational institutions, including public institutions, for-profit institutions, and private non-profit institutions, had affiliated libraries.

Racial and gender diversity is even more underrepresented in library personnel. The *Journal of Radical Librarianship*, 9 (2023) pp.98–115.

2017 ALA Demographic Survey report does not contain any surprising revelations about the demographics of libraries in the United States. As it has been for the past 30 years, the profession is still very much white and female (86.7% and 81%, respectively). According to the DPE (2021), 14.9% of all librarians are affiliated with colleges, universities, and professional schools such as medical and law schools. Even though it is a white female-dominated field, white males hold the administrative positions of power. As stated in McKenzie (2017), the Ithaka S+R's survey report revealed that 89% of librarians in administrative roles were white males.

The lack of diversity within a profession that claims diversity as a core value is disconcerting. Diversity among academic faculty and library staff is simply not keeping pace with the increase in the diversity of the student body served by those libraries. This mismatch between an increasingly diverse student body and a less diverse faculty body is “downright dangerous to the most vulnerable populations we serve” (Collins, 2018b, p. 16). These race and gender-based trends are also seen in the library examined in this study.

Diversity in Collections

With respect to collections, the ALA (2007) has clarified that, “[t]he strength of libraries has always been the diversity of their collections and commitment to serving all people” (para. 7). Academic libraries, libraries associated with an institution of higher education, pride themselves on curating and maintaining collections that incorporate a variety of voices and materials about marginalized communities, thus ensuring that all patrons can see themselves reflected within those collections. Despite a mention of *allocation of resources* in the 2022 statement by the ALA, nothing in these action areas explicitly addresses ensuring the inclusion of authentic representation through an author’s “genuine lens” and voice on a particular subject (Blume & Roylance, 2020) to create diverse collections. A diverse collection should include content “**by and about** a wide array of people and cultures to authentically reflect a variety of ideas, information, stories, and experiences” (Hamilton College, 2022, para. 2, emphasis added).

Acquisition of diverse collections generally falls to academic librarians, who “are perhaps uniquely equipped and empowered to define and redefine systems of knowledge that convey ‘truths’ about what we know about the world and how that knowledge is organized and evaluated” (Morales et al., 2014, p. 445). In this way, librarians become the gatekeepers of information throughout the university. The Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), a professional division of ALA that focuses solely on academic and research libraries, recognizes the importance of a library developing and maintaining diverse collections that represent all persons in the community that that library serves. The ACRL Standards for Development of Collections, Programs, and Services (2012) states:

For those responsible for the development and management of library collections and/or the provision of library programs and services, this specifically involves: Ensuring that consideration of the needs of historically oppressed, underrepresented, and underserved groups is integral to collection development and management and the provision of programs and services. Regularly assessing the adequacy of existing collections, programs, and services

to ensure they are reflective of the diversity of the library's constituent populations. (Standard 4)

Diversity of a collection, as viewed through the lens of critical race theory (CRT), further explained in the next section, is the primary focus of this article, which explores the extent to which the recent acquisitions of physical monographs in the social sciences and humanities of a Carnegie-designated Research 1 (R1) university library reflect diversity of collection in terms of topic, authorship, use of sources, and type of publishing press.

Research Design

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is a way to understand and make sense of institutional racism. The theory “foregrounds race as the central construct for analyzing inequality, and it offers...an alternative perspective in identifying more effective solutions to the challenges students of color face in school” (Zamudio et al., 2010, p. 2). CRT developed from critical legal studies from the 1970s and 1980s, and is a lens through which embedded racism can be analyzed and understood; the theory offers a means to scrutinize socially situated narratives of knowledge. The theory posits the idea of a *dominant narrative* (also known as the *master narrative*) – the paradigm of knowledge that is used to justify and reinforce the status quo by those in positions of power: white, able-bodied, cis-gendered, heteronormative males (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Zamudio et al., 2010). Library collections are an institutionalized and legitimized form of knowledge that can reinforce the status quo and those in positions of power; thus, an analysis of a sample of books can provide an entry into disrupting the dominant narrative – or at least begin critiquing it.

CRT maintains that racial inequality is endemic to life, racial privilege is preserved through whiteness, and the dominant worldview is one of whiteness; that is, the socially constructed perspective that prioritizes, privileges, and normalizes white people, white cultures, white knowledge, white intellectual infrastructure, and the white experience. CRT is based on philosophical tenets; the research project described herein is grounded in the tenets of *whiteness as property* (Harris, 1993) and *counter-narratives* (Delgado, 1995) as the main CRT lenses to gain a better understanding of how academic library collections are failing at truly being diverse, equal, and equitable.

Whiteness as property is based on the philosophical tenet that white people are able to possess, dominate, and exclude at will; whiteness automatically comes with privilege; social structures are designed for white people to succeed and maintain their power; there is always an interest in preserving white ideologies and status; and the core value of whiteness is exclusivity (Harris, 1993). The term *property* can also be referred to literally as that which is controlled by white people in the preservation of white interests – it could be actual land, or it could be intellectual property. This control may be exercised knowingly and directly, or indirectly by people who are unaware, but who default to protecting white interests without clearly understanding that they are doing so. For example, the researcher defines, from a perspective of whiteness, what can or cannot be considered as salient in a research investigation.

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Within the context of this study, this perspective of whiteness results in research – and more specifically monographs – in a library collection that approaches knowledge from a predominantly white perspective and thereby serves to preserve whiteness. CRT provides a lens that allows for an understanding of how academic library collections, literally the property acquired by and controlled by predominantly white personnel, are not diverse, equal, or equitable, and how, in the end, they reinforce whiteness, privilege, and inequality.

Counter-narratives are used to show other cultures, viewpoints, perspectives, and voices to contrast and highlight the dominant narrative (Delgado, 1995). These perspectives are typically not from a Eurocentric perspective and serve as a means to break down stereotypes. Counter-narratives also highlight inequities that would otherwise be invisible and can be an opportunity to highlight empowerment and agency in the face of these inequities. CRT thus provides a lens by which an organization or entity can be scrutinized to determine the extent to which racism is embedded (that is as a structural component of) the organization. These concepts were used to specifically find counter-narratives since they are necessary to disrupt the dominant narrative.

This CRT lens can be used for both a content-level and author-level analysis to find those counter-narratives. For example, under the general category of the World War II narrative, the dominant narrative is that of white men fighting in Europe and the white male leaders. The only mention of people of color are the “enemy” – the Japanese. This dominant narrative overlooks the participation of huge groups of people who were voiceless during this time period, to include Black soldiers who were segregated, Indigenous peoples who served as Code Talkers, Nisei soldiers who were forced to sign loyalty oaths, and women in general. The narratives of these people form the counter-narratives to the dominant narrative of World War II.

With reference to the CRT lens, this study explored the following question: *To what extent do the recent acquisitions of monographs in the social sciences and humanities of a Carnegie-designated Research 1 (R1) university library reflect diversity of collection in terms of topic, authorship, use of sources, and type of publishing press?*

The Library System: Size & Scope

The institution in question is a medium-sized, public, land-grant research university situated across multiple campuses in the northwestern United States. As a member of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), it is committed to diversity and “believes that human and intellectual diversity contribute to academic excellence, and that the Association and its member institutions benefit from the rich diversity of the persons who comprise our staff, faculty and students” (McPherson, 2010). This library system holds the Carnegie designation of an R1 library and has almost 2.5 million physical books in circulation within its current overall collection. The flagship campus has over 2.3 million physical monographs in its collection.

Creation of the Sample

To the best of this author’s knowledge, there is no standardized strategy or methodology for assessing an academic institution’s collection for diversity, though research shows emerging methodologies for diversity audits in pre-university level libraries. Each

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institution has its own criteria, strategic goals, and facet focus; therefore, there may be a variety of different approaches to how an institution performs a diversity audit. Some institutions may be focused on representation within the content of the materials, while another institution may be focused on the diversity of the authors. The various techniques used by libraries focus on data points, and can be either statistical, (such as circulation usage) or user-centered (patron surveys or focus groups to determine user needs). Many assessment strategies are audited against book award lists (Kristick, 2020; Monroe-Gulick & Morris, 2023), peer institutions' collections (Emerson & Lehman, 2022; Proctor, 2020), and/or using subject headings (Pederson, 2022).

An analysis of the entire collection would be a daunting undertaking and would require an extensive amount of time and resources not available in the middle of a pandemic. The larger the library collection, the more complex it is to have an intimate knowledge of the collection (Ciszek & Young, 2010). Therefore, a diversity audit needs to be manageable in order to identify the strengths and to narrow the gaps within the collection (Kristick, 2020; Mortenson, 2019).

From 2017 to early 2020, 364,946 volumes (58,258 physical monographs and 306,688 electronic monographs) were added to the system-wide collection. The majority of the physical monographs in this preliminary analysis were additions to the social sciences and humanities collection on the flagship campus; the electronic monograph additions were mostly in the STEM collection. This collection analysis is a small sampling of the physical materials added within this time frame, *and should not be interpreted as a representation of the strength of the overall collection*. Rather, this analysis project is to be used as an exploratory study to shed light on a much greater issue: how acquisitions align with efforts to diversify academic library collections.

For the purposes of this project, I chose to analyze a random and convenient selection of the recent acquisitions in the aforementioned disciplines: book jackets. Book jacket analysis offers a few advantages. This study focused on the physical collection, rather than what is available in the arguably more extensive, exclusively online collection. The physical collection offers a reflection on the optics of the experience of a student using the actual library because they enter a place with certain defining features: librarians and books. A second benefit of using book jackets is that they often offer information that is useful in obtaining a nuanced understanding of the contents and biographical information about the author. A third benefit is that, in the midst of pandemic lockdowns, book jackets were a convenient, manageable way to obtain significant information without interacting with the library. As is the case with many academic libraries, book jackets of print monographs are removed before the items enter circulation. The jackets are often retained for display or other purposes. For all these reasons, I chose to assess these physical materials taken from items that had been added to the collection over a time period of three years.

These books were approved by social sciences and humanities subject liaisons and were added to the collection through a variety of means, to include librarian selections, faculty/student requests, and donations. It should be noted that not all book jackets from materials purchased during this period were able to be included within the analysis collection as some of these jackets were in use by the library, and also not all

monographs have accompanying book jackets. Within these constraints (time frame, discipline, and availability of the jacket), the selection of the final sample consisted of completely random jackets stacked arbitrarily in unlabeled boxes on shelves and constituted an accurate representation of the types of monographs accrued. A total of 2,053 book jackets were analyzed of the 58,258 total (3.5%) physical monographs added to the collection during the time period of 2017 to early 2020.

Preparing the Sample

The sample collection was sorted into three hierarchical categories. The initial sorting was applied to topic content. If a book made it through this initial screening, it was further sorted for author (gender and race), and type of publishing press. This tiered approach to analysis was very labor- and reading-intensive as it required considerable data sorting.

The first sort of the book jackets was by topic since this is what library patrons, especially students, primarily choose books based on initially. Any texts that topically pertained to anything *other than* the dominant narrative – white, male, heteronormative, cisgender, able-bodied, and/or a Eurocentric thought – were set aside for analysis. For example, a book on the history of Ella Fitzgerald’s style of singing would have been set aside for further analysis as it centers a woman of color. Because of pandemic-related restrictions and no access to the physical monographs themselves, initial content determination was done by reading the book jacket to determine the key elements of the book’s content via the synopsis and subject headings. This initial selection was followed by searching ISBNs in WorldCat, institutional library record holdings, and internet searches to determine the content of the individual book.

This process was foundational to performing this university library-level diversity audit. Of those original 2,053 texts, only 461 books met the criteria for inclusion in the study; the remaining 1,592 books were not further analyzed because they were topically congruent with the elements of the dominant narrative. The remaining 461 materials, which met at least one criterion that was *not* part of the dominant narrative, were further examined to learn more about them.

These 461 books were then categorized into different headings based on their subject matter (for example: Diversity/Justice, Indigenous, etc., see tables for categories), and biographical research was conducted on the authors of these materials to document the race and gender of those authors. Pictures on the jacket were not used for identification; instead, all identification was done from author self-identification and promotional or other public-facing materials that could be obtained by keyword searches. The materials were then coded by *author gender* (Table 1), *author race* (Table 2), and if the author was affiliated with a university.

Table 1*Authors by Gender*

Book content category	Authors total	Male	Female	Queer / Nonbinary
Asian	107	73	33	0
Black	38	30	8	0
Disability	14	11	3	0
Diversity/Justice	85	63	22	1
Female	93	19	74	0
Gender/Sex	5	3	2	1
Indigenous	119	73	46	0
Latinx	52	38	14	0
Middle East	71	53	17	0
Race/Civil Rights	31	18	13	0
Schools	30	17	13	0
Slavery/Civil War	22	18	4	0
Total	667	416	249	2
Percentage		62%	37%	>1%

Table 2*Authors by Race*

Book content category	Authors total	White	BIPOC	Undetermined / Organization
Asian	107	59	47	1
Black	38	23	14	1
Disability	14	13	1	0
Diversity/Justice	85	63	22	0
Female	93	76	16	1
Gender/Sex	5	5	0	0
Indigenous	119	92	25	2
Latinx	52	37	13	2
Middle East	71	32	37	1
Race/Civil Rights	31	13	18	0
Schools	30	22	6	2
Slavery/Civil War	22	19	1	2
Total	667	454	200	12
Percentage		68%	30%	>2%

The materials were further coded by publishing companies, with an eye towards determining which had been published by university presses and which by independent publishers. The materials were also coded for what sources were used to develop the content of the book, such as memoirs, archival research, interviews, etc. (Table 3).

Table 3
Publishing Houses & Research Materials

Book content category	Books total	Independent Publisher	Research Materials
Asian	81	6	9
Black	34	1	8
Disability	2	0	0
Diversity/Justice	53	2	7
Female	86	7	37
Gender/Sex	5	0	2
Indigenous	56	4	19
Latinx	30	2	4
Middle East	55	3	9
Race/Civil Rights	27	2	5
Schools	11	2	2
Slavery/Civil War	21	1	3
Total	461	30	105
Percentage		7%	23%

Using traditional tools, such as the Library of Congress subject headings, will not provide a CRT lens into these dominant narratives. In this study, the content is the critical piece, the first part of the tiered sorting, for developing the framework to perform a preliminary diversity audit. Author-only analysis adds another layer of information as an author writing about the content can be either white or a person of color, or a man, woman, or a gender non-binary person. Publication house offers an even finer sorting, as a book can be published in academically recognized major publishing houses or an independent, smaller press that is focused on authentic representation and/or voices. Through this sorting mechanism (content-level, author-level, publishing house-level), the ideal situation would be a narrative about Code Talkers in World War II, as told by a Navajo scholar and published by an Indigenous or tribal publisher.

Results

This preliminary study found that the recently acquired materials in this collection do not reflect diversity of collection in terms of subject matter, authorship, or type of publishing press. Of the 2,053 books analyzed for this project, 1,592 (78%) monographs were grounded in the dominant narrative. Therefore, a total of 461 monographs with topics that did not incorporate any of the elements of the dominant narrative – 22% of the materials studied – were further analyzed. However, when the authors of these

materials were further analyzed based on different criteria, it became apparent that although libraries tout missions of equality and diversity, true representation of these initiatives is lacking in its collections. This lack of diversity is manifest in the publishing houses, authorship, and use of sources profiled in this sample.

Disparities in Publishing

Institutions with university presses not only create and produce knowledge but also influence the transmission of what counts as knowledge and is afforded a pulpit by publication. In this study, independent publishers produced only 7% (30 of the 461 titles) of the materials analyzed.

Publishing is mandatory for career advancement in higher education, and academics are urged to meet a certain set of criteria regarding publishing. There are typically four types of publications to meet position and tenure/promotion requirements in academia: peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, scholarly book chapters, and refereed conference papers. As noted by Grande (2018), "... refusal to comply with the normative structures of tenure and promotion (e.g. emphasizing quantity over quality; publishing in mainstream journals) can and does lead to increased marginalization, exploitation, and job loss" (p. 59). These published materials are believed to reflect the scholarly abilities and resilience of a successful academic, and all play a vital role in the esteemed creation of knowledge central to supporting the dominant narrative.

However, there are racial and gender disparities in academic publishing that cannot be ignored. Lee & Low Books, an independent publishing house committed to diversity, released the results of the 2019 Diversity Baseline Survey, which surveys over 30 large publishing houses and numerous academic journals. The results of the 2019 survey showed that 76% of the overall publishing industry self-identifies as white, 80% of book reviewers self-identify as white, and 85% of editorial departments self-identify as white. Unfortunately, these statistics have remained fairly consistent since Lee & Low first implemented this survey in 2015 to establish a diversity baseline of the publishing world; the results of that original survey were 79% white overall, with 89% of book reviewers identified as white, and 82% of editorial departments identified as white.

Editors and reviewers have the undisputed and unequivocal power to create the rules of academic writing and text publication guidelines based on their own definitions and norms for what is considered high-quality research (Mertkan et al., 2017). Steinberg et al. (2018) found in their study of investigating 10 years of reviewers for the medical journal *The Lancet*, 87% of reviewers were male and 13% female.

Large publishing companies hold great influence, as do educational institutions with university presses. Educational institutions are inherently white, and the majority of academic scholars within their walls are white. A recent study on academic library book selection executed by Walters et al. (2020) focuses on the selection criteria of librarians, faculty, and students, based on 287 books reviewed in *CHOICE*, a source for higher education library material reviews. Neither race nor gender categories were mentioned, yet "publisher type (university press or commercial publisher) are especially good predictors of selection status. Of the books selected by at least 70 percent of the selectors...79 percent were published by university presses" (Walters et al., 2020). One

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reviewer even remarked that the publisher was “not a university publisher,” so that material was not selected (Walters et al., 2020).

There is a power struggle of knowledge production and dissemination between the anglosphere world and the rest of the world, and typically independent publishers are willing to push boundaries and take market risks by allowing authors to have creative control of the information, and focus on non-Eurocentric cultural works, ideologies, epistemologies, and non-English languages. Tuck and Yang (2014) state, “[r]esearch is just one form of knowing, but in the Western academy, it eclipses all others. In this way, the relationship of research to other human ways of knowing resembles a colonizing formation, acquiring, claiming, absorbing, consuming” (p. 234). Counter-narratives become exceptionally salient as independent publishers provide spaces for people to tell their stories through a particular authentic lens and bring attention to what others have experienced, allowing for alternative perspectives and truths that are not from a Eurocentric viewpoint of the world.

Issues in Authorship

A two-thirds majority of the total number of authors (437 of 667 authors) that were analyzed in this study were affiliated with universities as faculty members; in academia, where 74% of full-time faculty are white (NCES, 2021d), this reflects an imbalance of works being produced. The authors in this sample collection analysis (n=667 since many monographs had more than one author) were overwhelmingly white and male; overall, 68% of the authors writing on a topic not of the dominant narrative were white, and 62% were male (454 and 416 out of 667 authors, respectively). A staggering 44% (293 authors) of the texts in the surveyed book jackets were authored by persons who were both white and males, even though the topics were not about the dominant narrative.

Academic library collections have amassed many works on non-white cultures and peoples, which are told by white voices through an outsider’s – that is, an etic – lens. For example, one notable monograph found in this analysis was about the positive influence that faith and churches have on Black and Latino relationships and marriages; this text was written by two white males. Cultural voices of color are simply not being captured, and are often being left out of conversations altogether, a practice that may lead to cultural erasure. This behavior reflects the tenet of *whiteness as property*. By seeking these opportunities to publish these stories, white authors benefit for either monetary or tenure-requirement purposes and are possibly party to distorting historical narratives by not incorporating knowledge and experiences that may have been passed down and/or lived. As part of the structural norm, the opportunities afforded to these authors have been absorbed into our institutions and are not considered offensive, and these white academics are presenting and publishing the materials without fear of any repercussions.

Ladson-Billings (2013) points out that “[t]he very discipline we call history is about the cultural narrative that cultures, nations, and societies tell, particularly about themselves” (p. 41). Tuck and Yang (2014) emphasize that “[a]cademic knowledge is particular and privileged, yet disguises itself as universal and common; it is settler colonial;...it sets limits to potentially dangerous Other knowledges; it does so through

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erasure, but importantly also through *inclusion*, and its own imperceptibility (p. 235). As members of the dominant race that controls the dominant narrative and have always controlled the curriculum, and more importantly the content taught, white authors cannot be counted on to question their own motives or ability to tell the complete, unbiased truth behind these stories; additionally, their social statuses as white members of academia, coupled with their educational backgrounds, normalize these experiences. By creating the curriculum, or the content in this instance, white people are asserting their dominance and assuring that their knowledge counts and will be taught at the institutional level; this practice further ensures that whatever story is being told is always told from the dominant group, and their understanding of the truth prevails.

“Academic libraries and librarians exercise considerable influence over the diversity (or lack thereof) of scholarship through choices they make in fulfilling the primary missions of collecting, preserving, and providing access to information” (Morales et al., 2014, p. 445). Unfortunately, when the majority of academic collections are filled with white authoritative knowledge designed and created by the dominant Eurocentric culture and published in white-dominated publishing houses, a clear message is sent: there is little value in what people of color have to say or think, that beliefs other than Eurocentric thought are invalid, and that we do not have a place for that which is not white, that which is not supportive of the white, dominant narrative within our spaces, whether those spaces are educational institutions or library collections.

Lived Experience as a Source

Of the materials analyzed in this project, only 23% (105 of the 461 total monograph jackets) specifically indicated in either the title or synopsis of the book, that the research was based on first-hand accounts. Other than the memoirs, all of the authors assumed they have the right to gather information from interviews, ethnographies, personal narratives, and other materials to construct knowledge and narratives. White authors are often writing narratives about cultures they do not fully understand and are not immersed within but are writing about observations or limited interactions/experiences, with few first-hand interviews occurring. Some would argue that this skates the line between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation. However, as hooks (1994) states, “reality can be known differently – some realities cannot be acquired through empirical or learned knowledge, but rather emerge from an “authority of experience.”

In addition, more than a dozen of the authors referred to “archival research” with no further explanation. It is important to take a moment and consider who historically has created this archival research, and there should be a “conversation about voices preserved in the archive and how those voices must be interrogated to find the motivation for creating and preserving a document...and for the researcher to determine what that tells us about the subject...” (Bowers et al., 2017, p. 166). Since the dominant race controls the dominant narrative and has always controlled the curriculum, it can safely be assumed that white people created these archives. This process just further perpetuates the cycle of white people creating knowledge based on Eurocentric ideologies, and storing and using that knowledge to further create and shape new knowledge grounded in the white worldview. This standard practice has become so embedded into our society and culture that it has become invisible.

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Discussion

Issues in the Library Structure

It is apparent from just this brief collection analysis that this library – and by extension other academic libraries – are maintaining and perpetuating whiteness within its collections, and one has to question if we may be doing more harm than good.

“Colonialism is a heavy heritage and difficult to throw off because infrastructures are put in place to assist the already powerful. Media and education can be used for ill or for good” (Hawthorne, 2016, p. 67). It is outside the scope of this project to discuss the many limitations that libraries face in explicit detail, but they should be taken into consideration and are worth mentioning because collection policies and decisions are made on these constraints.

It is no longer common for academic libraries to have librarians whose sole responsibility is to select materials on an individual, title-by-title basis. Instead, liaison librarians have been tasked with material selection for their discipline-specific areas in many academic libraries. The collection development duties are typically a fraction of their overall job duties, and many factors such as time constraints and a lack of collection development training have led academic libraries to acquire materials through a variety of other mechanisms. Many libraries and librarians have resorted to student or faculty patron-driven acquisition (PDA) programs, approval plans supplied through vendors, company-supplied book reviews, or rely on eBook collections through vendors and publishers (Walters et al., 2020). With the increasing cost inflation of subscription serials packages in the face of static budgets, many libraries are having to decrease their designated monograph funds.

Unfortunately, relying on these external selection tools during a time of extreme budget constraints, and having an abundant lack of diverse librarians, makes one question if status-quo practices truly are about equity and diversity and if capitalistic factors are driving libraries farther from their core mission. It should also be noted that by the very nature of having someone select materials, library collections are predisposed to some bias. “By nature, the library should reflect the population of the community in all its diversity, not the character or beliefs of any one librarian” (Cain, 2006, p. 7).

In the United States, white people are and have been the dominant and controlling group and have successfully maintained that the Eurocentric (white) point of view on the world is the only truth, and all other views are incorrect, white supremacy is by design, and white thoughts are privileged (Mills, 1997). The U.S. Supreme Court proclaimed that diversity in education is important, but using the white standard to create content to support the education system does not equal minority success, either academically or intellectually. Gusa (2010) asserts, “students within higher education institutions bring a diversity of identities and worldviews. The problem within higher education is not differing worldviews or ideologies, but, rather, the domination of one over others” (p. 469). This is the central takeaway from this review of acquisitions.

It is important as members of a higher education environment in any role or capacity that we may hold – as a student, instructor, librarian, or administrator – that we are aware that our own academic collections are just as susceptible to perpetuating these

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hegemonies of whiteness. Subscribing to the dominant narrative and thought ensures that there will always be a place and a space for white people, and they will always have a seat at the table where their voices will be the loudest. Gusa (2010) forewarns that when “whites neglect to identify the ways in which White ideological homogenizing practices sustain the structure of domination and oppression, they allow institutional policies and practices to be seen as unproblematic or inevitable and thereby perpetuate hostile racial climates” (p. 465). Leonardo and Boas (2013) take it even further with the claim:

All Whites play a part in the reproduction of racism. If it were only a problem of White elites, racism would be more transparent and perhaps easier to explain. But it requires recruiting White from all walks of life, from divergent statuses with their own cleavage of power. The process of racial hegemony creates alliances among different White interest groups wherein they surrender certain ideal goals, such as gender or class equality, in exchange for White racial domination. (p. 322)

This surrender of ideal goals of gender equality can be seen in a profession dominated by white women, yet the administrative positions of power belonging to white men. This is a prime example of the perpetuation of whiteness as property within all structures of the Eurocentric Western world. Leonardo and Boas (2013) argue that “through her whiteness, then, and also through the continued, routine failure of the education system, the White female...defends patriarchy, which is co-implicated with racism, even if she does not benefit from it” (p. 310).

Conclusion

As librarians whose unwavering purpose is to promote equality and equity to *all*, it is important to be mindful that our own collections may inadvertently be promoting whiteness, and we should know better and be more vigilant in not allowing ourselves to fall prey to these racial injustices. We cannot continue the practice of only subscribing to white voices and marginalizing the voices and epistemologies of people of color; we must become more deliberate and conscientious of including culturally responsive materials within our collections. Librarians are in the unique position of determining what world “truths” are not only notable and valuable but what information should be disseminated throughout educational structures. Our libraries should be designed to be a reflection of all members of the entire community in which they serve, and all of those different voices within the collection should be loud and clear. “...We still have a choice to remedy our schools thereby saving a generation of students from the intellectual numbness that comes from entertaining false assumptions about race in society” (Zamudio, 2010, p. 6).

We must keep in the forefront of our minds that librarians have a profound impact on who and what is represented within our collections, and if students cannot see themselves or hear their voices within them, then we have failed at our grand purpose. Therefore, the diversity and equity missions of academic libraries are perverted “because [those libraries] do not exist in a vacuum or with walls magically impermeable to the systemic oppression of the culture in which they are situated” (Collins, 2018b, p. 43). Given this personnel profile, libraries remain “entrenched in the false universality” (*Journal of Radical Librarianship*, 9 (2023) pp.98–115).

of privilege inherent to higher education and their parent institutions” (Collins, 2018b, p. 43). In short, hegemony breeds hegemony. This embedded hegemony, also reflected in the voices and authors of the works within a library's collection of resources, gives a new more nuanced meaning to the term *systemic racism*.

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