ENDNOTES

Contents

From the Editor

Welcome to this year's edition of *Endnotes: The Journal of the New Members Round Table,* the journal dedicated to supporting library school students and early-career librarians. In addition to the articles we're publishing this year, we have book reviews for the first time since 2018! I and the editorial board of *Endnotes* are thrilled to bring volume 13.1 to you.

In this issue, you will find case studies on participatory action research and archives and disability perspective in children's literature, as well as research papers that focus on reference services at community and technical colleges, book bans in Texas, and Facebook's BIPA litigation. There are also book reviews on information literacy, DEI and metadata, Black librarianship, and cataloging. There is something for many kinds of librarians and I hope you enjoy reading as much as I and the *Endnotes* committee did.

Endnotes is committed to creating a welcoming space for LIS students and early-career librarians to publish their research. Many of our

authors are first-time writers, and it is our mission to offer guidance through the publication process to ensure they feel confident in their work.

I extend my true gratitude to the Endnotes Committee for their dedication and hard work; there were many articles to review and a small committee to do it in a short amount of time. I also thank the American Library Association for its continued support.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Endnotes.* Please engage with the exemplary scholarship here, and consider submitting something to *Endnotes* or volunteering for the New Members Round Table next year.

Sincerely,
Emily Zerrenner, Editor

Editorial Policy

Endnotes (ISSN: 2159-0591) is the scholarly publication of the ALA New Members Round Table. The purpose of *Endnotes* is to provide support for LIS students and librarians who want or need to publish scholarly articles and to publish peer-reviewed research directed at new librarians. The *Endnotes* Committee oversees the publication of a peer-reviewed e-journal, *Endnotes: The Journal of the New Members Round Table.* The journal will be published on the ALA Web site and indexed in Library Literature. Each edition of the journal will contain at minimum two scholarly articles written by LIS students or early-career professional and/or scholarly book reviews of titles relevant to students and new librarians. The journal follows a policy of double-blind refereeing of articles in advance of publication.
For more information, please visit
https://journals.ala.org/index.php/endnotes

Librarians as Full Participants in Participatory Action Research

Presley Dyer, Georgia Institute of Technology
Caitlin Hochuli, Mercer University
Lindsey Walker, Texas Women's University
Leah Panther, Mercer University
Kim Eccles, Mercer University
Tyler Osborn, Towns County Historical Society
Tamara Livingston, Kennesaw State University

Abstract

This case study of a participatory archiving event and its resulting collaborative digital archive is used to illustrate the powerful impact librarians have within participatory action research projects. It outlines the essential roles played by the three research, metadata, and archive librarians who worked alongside university faculty, community members, and a classroom teacher to preserve the languages, literacy practices, and histories of Southern Appalachia. This results in recommendations for viewing libraries as research sites and librarians as research partners across the entire research process to better connect public institutions to the communities they serve.

Keywords: participatory action research; participatory archiving; research librarian; metadata librarian; archive librarian

Article Type: Case study

Introduction

The team gathered in a small conference room beneath a large church sanctuary, where fluorescent lights flickered over wooden chairs and a table surrounded by three people. Caitlin (Author 2) snaked wires between computers, microphones, and scanners, while Presley (Author 1) booted up her laptop and checked the audio recorder while chatting with Summer, a community volunteer. During that conversation, Presley and Summer (a pseudonym) found a connection: both were career librarians. While arranging the space for the first participants to arrive for a community based participatory action research project, Summer began reminiscing about her time working in archives. "I did Special Collections," she explained, "and we had to go through an archive box that somebody had donated. . . We would have to go through and manually index and abstract all that stuff." As the group reflected on the convenience of the technology now available to collect and organize archives, Summer shared more about her journey to become a librarian and the evolving nature of the profession. "I worked at [an urban higher education institution], and I told them when I went there, I said, my heart is in the mountains and in public libraries. That's where I want to be."

After many years in academia—supporting students with dissertation research, managing special collections, and engaging in cross-disciplinary collaborations—Summer returned to the region she loved. Though the

Endnotes: The Journal of the New Members Round Table
Volume 13, Issue 1, 2025
pp. 3-13
Published by the American Library Association
© Retained by the Authors
ISSN: 2159-0591

work at the small public library in town presented unique challenges, she adapted quickly:

> When I came to Mountain Regional, I . . . helped with writing the program to translate everybody's small online catalog into full data for the PINES database, along with the algorithms for that. It worked out that the skill set I had wasn't necessarily about being an expert in anything, but being adaptable. A computer professor at LSU once told me, 'Libraries are going to be big in computers. They're on the fringe now, but they're going to be really big.'

Looking around the room at the metadata intake forms, spreadsheets, and scanners humming to life, Summer reflected on how libraries had embraced new tools to remain vital hubs of innovation and accessibility. Even more so, *librarians* serve as gateways to knowledge and resources, empowering individuals to engage with new technologies and, in this small church conference room, preserve cultural histories.

Summer's stories offer a window into the often-overlooked yet transformative contributions librarians make to participatory action research. This case study focuses on the essential roles played by three academic librarians specializing in metadata (Author 1), research (Author 5), and archives (Author 7). These librarians partnered with a literacy professor (Author 4), school-based coordinator and doctoral candidate (Author 3), school-based teacher, community-based educator (Author 2), and historical society president (Author 6) to complete a participatory action research project.

Participatory action research in the humanities typically brings together diverse stakeholders to address pressing community challenges. Librarians are often called upon later in these projects—to organize oral histories, correct metadata errors, or locate overlooked resources. However, this case study demonstrates how including librarians from the onset can transform a project, ensuring greater organization,

innovation, and impact. Through the case study of *Swappin' Stories*, we highlight the essential contributions of academic librarians as collaborators in preserving and amplifying community voices.

Literature Review

Participatory Action Research. Participatory Action Research (PAR) is rooted in methodological pluralism, integrating "research, action, and participation" to address community-driven concerns (Lawson, 2015, p. 6). At its core, PAR emphasizes "shared ownership of research projects, community-based analysis of social problems, and an orientation towards community action" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 11). Israel et al. (1998) delineates eight guiding principles for community-based participatory research, underscoring the importance of recognizing "the community as a unit of identity," building on local strengths, and ensuring equity in knowledge access (p. 178). Specifically, the integration of knowledge and action for the "mutual benefit of all partners" and the dissemination of findings to the entire community (Israel et al., 1998, p. 179).

This community-centered approach challenges conventional epistemological boundaries by expanding what constitutes valid knowledge. Gutierrez et al. (2023) describe cultural intuition as an essential source of knowledge that emerges from "personal experiences, existing literature, professional experiences, and the analytic research process" (p. 293). This framework legitimizes the lived experiences of community members as critical sources of insight, thereby reshaping traditional notions of what knowledge "counts" in research.

In line with this, recent scholarship emphasizes the importance of clearly defining "community" within PAR projects, allowing community members, rather than external researchers or non-representative leaders, to articulate these boundaries. This not only prevents the term "community" becoming coded for race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, but also ensures that

community participation reflects a deeper engagement with "cultural processes that form the common practices of particular communities," rather than an individual's categorical identity (Rogoff, 2003, p. 80; Ruhland et al., 2023). The critical focus on community practices is particularly salient in Appalachian contexts, where local knowledge is frequently dismissed as "folksy" reflecting classist assumptions that delegitimize non-mainstream knowledge (Rittenour et al., 2020). PAR, however, provides a mechanism for reclaiming this community knowledge as valuable and sophisticated.

When participatory action research became a more established inquiry model during the 1990s, eclecticism was highly valued as "groups of researchers, professional and social activists developed approaches suited to the problems they were facing in their work" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 15). As the people involved in research expanded, so, too, did the primary sites of research. Libraries and archives serve as critical sites for the reimagining of community knowledge and action within PAR. Public libraries, with their democratic accessibility, often function as hubs for PAR meetings, data collection, and public dissemination of findings (McConnell Parsons et al., 2022). Manley and colleagues (2019) extend this role further, describing archives as "laboratories" where librarians collaborate with community members to teach research practices, facilitate access to historical resources, and co-create knowledge. Moreover, public history institutions can play an instrumental role by "collaborating with schools and other civic education organizations" to ensure that rich primary sources are integrated into educational curricula (Munn & Wickens, 2018, p. 98). Through such collaborations, libraries and archives not only provide the material resources for community-based research but also serve as active agents in the co-production and dissemination of knowledge.

Despite the transformative potential of PAR, scholars caution against its uncritical application. Academics displeased with neoliberal systems

inherent in use of space and time within academia may turn to PAR without full acknowledgement of the privilege and resources they still have access to (Hickey, 2020). Nygreen (2009) argues that PAR projects, while appearing egalitarian, may inadvertently "reproduce and exacerbate power inequalities" (p. 19). Lewis and Moje (2007) noted that "systems and regimes are produced and reproduced" through the micropractices of research, even when efforts are made to subvert oppressive power structures (p. 17-18). Therefore, participants must engage in a conscious reexamination of their social world, aiming to "change it collectively, by thinking about it differently, acting differently, and relating to one another differently" in order to construct new "practice architectures" that are more just, inclusive, and sustainable (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 17).

Participatory Action Research, Archives, and Librarians. Roulston and deMarrais (2021) explain archives serve three primary purposes: (1) generating the "material for histories of countries and communities, and genealogies and family histories, (2) as tools for accountability for tracking injustices and repression, and (3) as touchstones for memory and identity" (p. 4). Community archiving and participatory archiving have the potential to meet the primary purposes of archives while rooted in the onto-epistemological commitments of participatory action research. These are not new concepts (e.g., Bastian, 2003). Particularly during the pandemic, public sourcing of transcription work and metadata increased in popularity (LaPierre, 2021; Roulston & deMarrais, 2021). The shift towards community and participatory archiving models has demonstrated benefits to libraries and librarians, such as aligning daily work with professional standards, fostering ownership of learning, and making community narratives more complex (Ahlfeld, 2021).

More sophisticated and long-term participatory archiving projects are sites to "preserve community-identified cultural heritage", typically

through a participatory process that includes "collection development, appraisal, arrangement, and description" but also "in planning the digital archives itself, controlling all aspects of design, functionality, and appearance" (Allard & Ferris, 2015, p. 370). The participatory nature moves towards meaningful remixes and bricolages that acknowledge the blurry line between the record's content and context (Bak et al., 2019).

The community-based and participatory archiving process also includes creating descriptive records and metadata (Bak et al., 2019). Many archivists revisit descriptive practices in cataloging and metadata to ensure ethical descriptions. For example, they question, "How would you describe a White supremacist group if they themselves did not identify as that? How do you decide how people label themselves?" (Roulston & deMarrais, 2021, p. 75). This is crucial for preserving Georgia's Appalachian identity, which research has highlighted is often erased (Dyer & Walker, 2024). As Kinsey (2019) describes, "The archive is its own contested terrain, full of choices and contingency rather than the whole truth and nothing but the truth" (p. 19). Participatory archiving allows community members to be involved in the descriptive metadata process, helping to preserve local languages, practices, and knowledge. As Howard (2022) describes: "Participatory archives offer a space of reconciliation for communities who may be plagued by misunderstanding, mistrust, and mistreatment" (p. 7).

Furthermore, there are challenges faced by non-historians or interdisciplinary scholars who seek to "historicize" their topics but lack a clear understanding of historical methodology. This perpetuates the tension between needing a rigorous approach to integrate historical context into archives and community narratives while recognizing the interpretive nature of historical scholarship: there is a temptation to oversimplify historical narratives rather than enhance the relevance of historical analysis in contemporary research (Kinsey, 2019). Participatory approaches to archival work, such as decolonial

remixing of existing archives, eases this tension by nuancing and centering marginalized histories (e.g. McCreary & Murnaghan, 2020; Zavala Guillen, 2023).

Thus, the interdisciplinary nature of a participatory action research team enables members to contribute diverse skills and perspectives, fostering strengths in innovative technologies, community-based methods for uncovering new information, and preserving nuanced narratives of cultural heritage in community archives (Oberbichler et al., 2021).

Case Study

The *Swappin' Stories* project involved significant planning and community engagement to host a week-long participatory action research archiving event in Towns County, Georgia. This project focused on preserving the community's rich Appalachian history through oral histories, artifacts, and storytelling, while building knowledges, skillsets, and resources for school and community- based education efforts.

Summarizing the project, the team began our preparations by visiting established archives to learn about digitization techniques and metadata structures for long-term preservation from various interdisciplinary perspectives. This step also involved securing new equipment and training the team on the necessary technology such as scanners, external hard drives, and microphones. McConnell Baptist Church, centrally located in Hiawassee, was selected as the venue for its accessibility and generous offer of free space. The team ensured that the space was ADA-compliant, soundproof for audio recording, and provided a welcoming environment for community members. To reach potential participants, the team issued a press release that was published as a newspaper article. Social media platforms, local historical society meetings, and the Chamber of Commerce website were also used for promotion. A toll-free number was provided for community members to set up appointments, and walk-ins were welcome as an

acknowledgement of "mountain time", a cultural value that prioritizes being in the moment with other people over efficiency models of time management.

The archiving event lasted a week with two public days for archiving. Volunteers from the Towns County Historical Society were trained on-site to use technology and handle artifacts, offering invaluable support for the event. Over the following two days, community members were invited to bring print-based items, which were digitized while oral histories were recorded about each item. Participants were required to complete an intake form which was corroborated against the oral history to determine the metadata. Volunteers assisted with scanning and recording oral histories, while external hard drives were used for data backup. Each item contributed by the community was carefully documented, including the history behind it and its relevance to Towns County's Appalachian heritage.

The team also contributed to the Towns County Historical Society's efforts by creating a photo wall with unidentified historical images. Community members were encouraged to provide metadata and context for these images using transparent post-it notes, sparking conversations about local history. A volunteer at the photo wall also invited participants to record stories in the storytelling booth, preserving the oral histories that emerged from these discussions. Similarly, to support the Towns County school system, several stations were set up collecting community information related to the school curriculum. For example, a folklore station captured community stories and unique "Appalachia-isms" related to English language arts while a map room allowed participants to add place names, memories, and stories to a laminated county map related to geography and social studies standards.

After the event, the team continued its work for three additional days. This allowed for the completion of metadata for archived items, the development of school-based educational

resources, and further research into the oral histories and artifacts collected. The team visited historical sites mentioned in the oral histories, conducted home interviews with community members who could not attend the event, and verified stories through archival research.

After completing the data collection from our project, part of dissemination was the establishment of a special collection within Kennesaw State University's archives, where the artifacts would be stored alongside oral histories. This digital repository ensures that the materials are available for public education and ongoing research.

The *Swappin' Stories* program successfully created an inclusive, community-driven process for preserving the Appalachian history of Towns County (for more about the event see Panther et al., in press). By engaging community members, educators, and students, the event not only preserved the past but also forged strong educational and social connections that will sustain the community's cultural legacy for future generations. The archival materials collected, alongside the oral histories, serve as a critical resource for understanding the diverse narratives that shape the region.

Discussion

At the completion of *Swappin' Stories*, the interdisciplinary participatory action research team has continued to reflect on and analyze the collaboration in order to support similar projects (e.g., Panther et al., in press) and expand our efforts to develop a community archive. In the analysis of our work, two clear lessons were (1) the essential role that librarians play as active research partners and (2) libraries as sites for multiple stages of the research process.

Librarians as Research Partners. In the *Swappin' Stories* project, the university-based research librarian, metadata librarian, and archive librarian each brought essential expertise to support the successful archiving and preservation of Towns County's Appalachian

history as a part of the community-based participatory action research team. Integrating university librarians from the beginning allows them to contribute their specialized knowledge—skillsets often undervalued or unknown to educators (Kammer at al., 2021). This early involvement ensures that the project is structured around quality practices for data collection, storage, and accessibility (e.g., Casey et al., 2023; Grant et al., 2019), which is crucial for community-based projects that focus on preserving history and culture (Poole, 2023).

Kim, a research librarian, played a pivotal role in coordinating the research aspects of the project, including the initial visits to established archives, training in digitization techniques, and identifying appropriate archival tools and equipment (e.g., scanners, microphones, hard drives). Kim also supported the educational outcomes by helping develop school-based resources and facilitating community research. The research librarian collaborated with the team to ensure that the digitization process goes beyond data storage to meet preservation standards (Woodward, 2016). Furthermore, she framed the purpose of research on community and continually refocused the collaboration to keep community at the center of research (Johnson, 2017; Kammer, 2021). Research librarians are often the faces and voices of libraries, making them ideal collaborators for creating a safe and welcoming environment for the community to share their artifacts (Roechley & Kim, 2019).

Presley, a metadata librarian, assumed a crucial role in documenting materials for long-term accessibility and preservation by utilizing the Dublin Core metadata standard to record key elements like dc.creator, dc.title, and dc.subject, thus enhancing interoperability and discoverability across digital repositories. This method aligns with James and Punzalan's (2015) belief in the importance of metadata for connecting historical records to contemporary research. Following the "DACS Required Elements at the Collection Level for KSU Archives" (Kennesaw State University Archives, 2022a), Presley developed workflows that linked

descriptive elements with the necessary contextual depth for scholarly use, while implementing quality control procedures from the KSU Archives documentation (2022b) to ensure the metadata preserved cultural significance and met professional standards. These integrated practices positioned the archive as both a valuable cultural resource and an academic tool.

The archive librarian, Tamara, managed the preservation and long-term accessibility of the materials. Her expertise in organizing and preserving the oral histories, artifacts, and documents contributed by community members ensured that the digital repository was created with best practices in archival standards. This role involved working closely with the research and metadata librarians to establish the special collection within Kennesaw State University's archives, and then with Lindsey, Leah, and Tyler to ensure the materials reflected the community's goals and vision. Ultimately, she ensured the longevity and educational value of the digital archive for future research.

Collaboratively, all three librarians played a critical role in training community members, volunteers, and student interns in essential archival skills, such as handling artifacts, navigating which artifacts to prioritize, and documenting metadata. By equipping dozens of individuals with these skills, librarians ensured the integrity and inclusion of the community in archival work, fostering a deeper understanding of the archival process and encouraging sustained involvement in building community archives (Grant et al., 2019). This was done alongside an interdisciplinary team of educators and community members who also took shared responsibility for building the reciprocal and sustaining relationships with the community and community members, acknowledging the workload constraints of each team member while drawing from their individualized strengths (Hall, 2023). Ultimately, the collaborative aspects of the participatory action research team resulted in empowering individuals to contribute meaningfully (Hall, 2023).

Libraries as Research Sites. When we think of *research sites*, the focus often narrows to locations where data is collected: a sterile lab extracting samples, a boisterous elementary classroom under observation, or a survey on a glowing screen. However, research unfolds across multiple interconnected spaces and times, and libraries emerge as pivotal research sites both before and after data collection. In *Swappin' Stories*, data collection was rooted in community spaces, yet much of the research process—analyzing artifacts, managing metadata, and planning dissemination—took place within libraries. These spaces supported the transition from raw data to actionable knowledge essential for the participatory action research process.

Libraries are uniquely equipped to serve as hubs for the preservation and accessibility of participatory research. Their infrastructure allows for the creation of long-term repositories that align oral histories with artifacts (e.g., Tummino & Fernandez, 2023), ensuring that materials are systematically preserved and accessible for future generations. Participatory archives housed in libraries foster inclusivity and trust, bridging the gap between academic institutions and local communities (Howard, 2022). Libraries also support the ethical responsibility to document and preserve complex or underrepresented histories, providing space for honest engagement with community narratives (Jorio & Hellweg, 2022).

Moreover, libraries' hybrid function as community centers and academic resources makes them ideal sites for bridging diverse perspectives. They offer tools, platforms, and spaces that transform raw community contributions into polished, publicly accessible archives. By facilitating the alignment of community knowledge with academic standards, libraries expand the definition of research sites to include spaces of collaboration, analysis, and dissemination. Ultimately, their role is not just to safeguard knowledge but to amplify its reach, making libraries indispensable to participatory research and the preservation of cultural heritage.

In bridging the gap between academic institutions and local communities, community archives provide opportunities to include diverse perspectives and address historical and cultural misunderstandings. University librarians are uniquely positioned to bridge academic institutions and local communities through their expertise in designing accessible, sustainable archives (Benoit & Eveleigh, 2019). By aligning oral histories with existing artifacts (e.g., Tummino & Fernandez, 2023) and establishing long-term repositories, librarians ensure that collections are preserved for future generations and remain valuable resources for ongoing education and research. Participatory archives, as Howard (2022) notes, foster trust and inclusivity, addressing historical and cultural misunderstandings by centering community voices. This work requires librarians to balance academic standards with ethical responsibilities, ensuring that histories—however complex or uncomfortable—are preserved authentically (Jorio & Hellweg, 2022).

Moreover, librarians actively seek to amplify untold stories, creating thoughtfully designed entry points for representation and inclusivity (Barnett & Witenstein, 2020). Their institutional connections enhance the visibility and impact of community archives, extending their reach to academic and public platforms. Libraries, as Kitzie et al. (2020) observe, serve as trusted spaces that foster belonging, making them ideal hubs for participatory research. By facilitating these collaborations, librarians uphold the dual mission of preservation and celebration, ensuring that community contributions resonate far beyond their original contexts.

Conclusion

Librarians are more than custodians of knowledge—they are innovators, educators, and connectors who breathe life into participatory action research projects like *Swappin' Stories*. Their ability to adapt to changing technologies,

train community volunteers, and create accessible archives transforms what might seem like ordinary collections of oral histories and artifacts into powerful living records of community identity. These efforts not only preserve the past but actively shape the ways in which communities understand themselves and envision their futures.

However, the success of participatory projects like *Swappin' Stories* depends on recognizing and supporting the expertise of librarians at every stage. Interdisciplinary teams, educators, and community advocates must champion librarians as indispensable partners in this work. This involves creating spaces where librarians can share their knowledge, allocating resources to sustain their efforts, and prioritizing their leadership within research teams. When educational institutions and communities invest in the professional growth of librarians and celebrate their contributions, they create opportunities to reimagine and expand what is possible. Librarians, with their commitment to access, innovation, and collaboration, are uniquely positioned to bridge the past and present, ensuring that the voices of today echo far into the future.

References

Ahlfeld, K. (2021). Creating community archives: Giving voice to the unheard. *Journal of Library Administration, 61*(4), 493-499. https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2021.1906570

Allard, D. & Ferris, S. (2015). Antiviolence and marginalized communities: Knowledge creation, community mobilization, and social justice through a participatory archiving approach. *Library Trends, 64*(2), 360-383. https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2015.0043

Bak, G., Allard, D., & Ferris, S. (2019). Knowledge organization as knowledge creation: Surfacing community participation in archival arrangement and description. *Knowledge Organization,*

46(7), 502-521. https://doi.org/10.5771/0943-7444-2019-7-502

Barnett, R. M. & Witenstein, M. A. (2020). Imagining a climate of equity through critical theory of love: Using CPAR to identify guiding principles that humanize library work. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship, 46,* 1-7. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2020.102176

Bastian, J. A. (2003). *Owning memory: How a Caribbean community lost its archives and found its history.* Bloomsbury Academic. https://doi.org/10.5040/9798400694752

Benoit, I. E., & Eveleigh, A. (Eds.). (2019). *Participatory archives : Theory and practice*. Facet Publishing.

Casey, M., Coghlan, D., Carroll, Á., & Stokes, D. (2023). Towards a checklist for improving action research quality in healthcare contexts. *Systemic Practice and Action Research, 36*(6), 923-934. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11213-023-09635-1

Dyer, P & Walker, L. (2024, April 12). *Yes, there are mountains in Georgia: Exploring the erasure of Georgia's Appalachian language and literacies* [Symposium Paper Presentation]. AERA Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA, United States.

Grant, V., Bazela, C. A., & Little, A. V. (2019). Co-designing a programme level approach to information and digital literacy: Initial reflections from our participatory action research project. *Proceedings of the IATUL Conferences.* Paper 7.

Gutierrez, R. A. E., Sonsteng-Person, M., King-Shaw, S., & Valmocena, M. T. (2023). For the institution or for the

community?: Toward an anti-oppressive research praxis in conducting participatory action research. *Journal of Community Practice, 31*(3-4), 284-296. https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2023.2272162

Hall, R. (2023). Exploring the role of information literacy instruction in student co-creation of community-based research products. *Communications in Information Literacy, 17*(2), 308-331. https://doi.org/10.15760/comminfolit.2023.17.2.1

Hickey, A. (2020). Generation animation: Participatory action research and intergenerational pedagogy. *Media Practice and Education, 21*(2), 109-120. https://doi.org/10.1080/25741136.2020.1769952

Howard, A. (2022). Centering the margins: A participatory archives literature review. *Kentucky Libraries, 86*(1).

Israel, B. A., Schulz, A. J., Parker, E., A., & Becker, A. B. (1998). Review of community-based research: Assessing partnership approaches to improve public health. *Annual Review of Public Health, 19,* 173-202. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.publhealth.19.1.173

James, C., & Punzalan, R. L. (2015). Legacy matters: Describing subject-based digital historical collections. *Journal of Archival Organization, 12*(3–4), 198–215. https://doi.org/10.1080/15332748.2015.1150104

Jorio, R. & Hellweg, J. (2022). Introduction: Critical collecting & participatory archiving: Alternative visions for managing cultural resources between Global South and North. *Mande Studies, 24*, 245-249. https://doi.org/10.2979/mande.24.1.13

Johnson, J. (2017, December 14). Common heritage update: NEH continues support for community archives in 2018. *National Endowment for the Humanities.* https://www.neh.gov/news/common-heritage-update-neh-continues-support-community-archives-2018

Kammer, J., King, M., Donahay, A., & Koeberl, H. (2021). Strategies for successful school librarian and teacher collaboration. *School Library Research, 24,* 1-24.

Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Nixon, R. (2014). *The action research planner: Doing critical participatory action research.* Springer eBooks. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4560-67-2

Kennesaw State University Archives. (2022a). DACS to MARC simplified [Internal document].

Kennesaw State University Archives. (2022b). DACS required elements at the Collection Level for KSU Archives [Internal document].

Kinsey, D. C. (2019). Three points about history especially for non-historians. *Canadian Journal of History, 54*(1-2), 1-20. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/733550

Kitzie, V. L., Pettigrew, J., Wagner, T. L., & Vera, A. N. (2020). World Café methodology to support community-centric research and practice in library and information science. *Library and Information Science Research, 42*(4), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2020.101050

LaPierre, S. S. (2021). Participatory digital archiving and community engagement during COVID-19. *Computers in Libraries, 41*(1), 5-8. https://www.infotoday.com/cilmag/jan21/LaPierre--Participatory-Digital-Archiving-an

d-Community-Engagement-During-COVID-19.shtml

Lawson, H. A. (2015). *Participatory action research.* Oxford University Press.

Lewis, C., & Moje, C. (2007). Examining opportunities to learn literacy: the role of critical sociocultural research. *Reframing sociocultural research on literacy: identity, agency, and power.* Routledge.

Manley, E. S., Fertel, R., Schwartzberg, J., & Ticknor, R. (2019). Teaching in the archives: Engaging students and inverting historical methods classes at the historic New Orleans collection. *The History Teacher, 53*(1), 67-105. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27058565

McConnell Parsons, J., Kohls, K., Roberts, S., McConnell Parsons, J., & Ridolfo, J. (2022). Course designs: WRD 110 – Composition and Communication I: Researching oral histories of the University of Kentucky. *Communication Studies, 50*(3), 105-117.

McCreary, T., & Murnaghan, A. M. F. (2020). Remixed methodologies in community‑based film research. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien, 64*(4), 576-589. https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12641

Munn, K., & Wickens, A. K. (2018). Public history institutions: Leaders in civics through the power of the past. *Journal of Museum Education, 43*(2), 91-103. https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2018.1453598

Nygreen, K. (2009). Critical dilemmas in PAR: Toward a new theory of engaged research for social change. *Social Justice, 36*(4), 14-35. https://www.jstor.org/stable/29768559

Oberbichler, S., Boros, E., Doucet, A., Marjanen, J., Pfanzelter, E., Rautianen, J., Toivonen, H., Tolonen, M. (2022). Integrated interdisciplinary workflows for research on historical newspapers: Perspectives from humanities scholars, computer scientists, and librarians. *Journal of the Association of Information Science and Technology, 73,* 225-239. https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24565

Panther, L., Walker, L., Dyer, P., Osborn, T., & Abernathy, K. (in press). Participatory community archiving to preserve and sustain North Georgia Appalachia's language, literacy practices, and histories. *Georgia Library Quarterly.*

Poole, A. H. (2023). "Get our feet wet and hands dirty": Black community‑based librarianship and the fight against information poverty, 1940‑1975. *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, *60*(1), 353-367. https://doi.org/10.1002/pra2.794

Rittenour, C. E., Baker, J. P., Burgess, K., B., Shields, K. E., & Okai, L. B. (2020). Communicated stereotypes, attitudes, and intended accommodation of Appalachians. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 49*(4), 283-300. https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2020.1772342

Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development.* Oxford University Press.

Roulston, K., & deMarrais, K. (2021). *Exploring the archives: A beginner's guide for qualitative researchers*. Myers Education Press.

Ruhland, E. L., Johnson, L., Moore, J., Pelly, C., Bess, S., & Dariotis, J. K. (2023). Positionality, intersectionality, power dynamics in community participatory

research to define public safety in Black communities. *Journal of Community Psychology, 51*(7), 2845-2860. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.23046

Tummino, A., & Fernandez, V. (2023). Amplifying civil rights collections with oral histories: A collaboration with alumni at Queens College, City University of New York. *Archival Issues*, *42*(1). https://doi.org/10.31274/archivalissues.16292

Woodward, E. (2016). Participatory archiving: The next generation in archival methodology. *College & Research Libraries News, 77*(8), 382-386. https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.77.8.9550

Zavala Guillen, A. L. (2023). Feeling/thinking the archive: Participatory mapping Marronage. *Area*, *55*(3), 416-425. https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12869

Disability Perspective in Children's Literature: A Case Study

Emma S. Wright, Wood County District Public Library

Abstract

Children's literature plays an important role in influencing the socio-emotional development of children. Representation of different aspects of life in children's literature has gained a focus over the past few decades, especially in terms of the display of diversity. An important aspect of diversity is disability representation. This study focuses on the collection within the Serving Every Ohioan (SEO) library system, which at the time of study included 99 library systems across the state of Ohio. Books tagged with terms ranging from "disability," "Children's disability," and specific impairments in the juvenile collections were selected for review. A survey of 162 fiction picture books about disabled children were read for characteristics such as the disability focus, narrator focus, use of characters of color, and general themes. This paper examines the occurrence of these themes and proposes the need for more authentic representation of disability in children's literature, for both disabled and non-disabled children. This research aims to illuminate patterns within children's disability literature while also discussing the vital need for such literature on library shelves.

Keywords: disability, children's literature, picture books, accessibility

Article Type: Case study

Introduction

For as long as humanity has existed, so has disability and disabled people. But, disabled people have not always been represented in popular discourse in a positive light. In the United States, it was not until the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, and specifically section 504, that disabled people had any federal protections against disability. Later, in 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) mandated the provision of a free and appropriate public school education for eligible students aged 3 to 21 in the United States (NCES, 2023). This legislation highlighted major historical disparities in the rights and visibility of disabled children and adults alike.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), there are over 7.3 disabled students in the United States, making up around 15% of public school enrollment during the 2021-2022 school year (Schaeffer, 2023). That is 7.3 million students that deserve to see themselves represented in the literature used inside and outside of the classroom. Yet, representation of disabled children in children's literature has historically been lacking. The Cooperative Book Center (CBC) in 2019 found that only 3.4% of children's books surveyed had disabled main characters (Kingsbury, 2021). This study sets out to examine what disability literature has been produced for children, with books published from 1978 to 2024, within the Serving Every Ohioan (SEO) cooperative collection. This study mirrors those of Kupper (1994), Blaska and Lynch (1992), Ayala (1999); Kaplan, Tobin, Dolcetti, and McGowan (2002), Beckett, Ellison, Barrett, and Shah (2009); and

Hayden and Prince (2023). While not a comprehensive study, this research aims to illuminate patterns within children's disability literature while also discussing the vital need for such literature on library shelves.

Social Model Framework. There are three generally recognized models for discussing disability - the moral, medical, and social (Olkin, 2022). The moral model frames disability as being a result of the person's, or their family's, actions or thoughts, or as a result of the moral failings of someone with a disability. The medical model frames disability and its symptoms as something pathological and clinical that must be cured. This model often focuses on "curing" disability. The social model of disability argues that disability occurs due to inadequate and unaccommodating social and physical factors in the environment. It is the environmental situation that blocks access and not the person's condition. As Olkin argues, "Negative stereotypes, discrimination and oppression serve as barriers to environmental change and full inclusion" (2022, para. 5).

This paper will discuss disability according to the social model of disability. The social model has a fundamental belief that we live in a disabling society that creates disability, and that it is not the fault of the disabled person that society cannot or does not meet their needs. It is important to acknowledge the bias that comes with each model and address how that impacts the discussion of this study's findings. The social model separates the biological - i.e., medical condition - from the social consequences.

Language Choice. This paper will use a mix of person-first and identity-first language. There are differing opinions from disabled people and disability advocates on what form of language to use when discussing disability. Traditionally, educators and librarians were taught to utilize person-first language, which places the person before the disability - i.e., person who uses a wheelchair, person with autism, person who is blind, etc. Advocates of person-first language

want to emphasize the person over the disability, making it possible to separate the two (Brown, n.d.). There is a growing wave amongst disability advocates to use identity-first language - i.e., - disabled person, Autistic person, Deaf person, etc. (Sinclair, 1999; Duncan, 2011, Brown, n.d.; Liebowitz, 2015). Advocates for identity-first language argue that it recognizes and affirms someone's identity as having that disability, as one cannot separate their existence from it (Brown, n.d.). This is especially true in the Deaf community and in the Autism community. This paper uses a mix of person-first language and disability-first language, depending on the language used in the text discussed ("Has Autism," 2011).

Literature Review

Historic children's literature conjures characters like Helen in *What Katy Did* (1972) by Susan Coolidge, Colin in *The Secret Garden* (1911) by Frances Hodgson Burnett, or Pollyanna in *Pollyanna* (1911) by Eleanor Porter (Dowker, 2004). Western fairy tales are full of deformed witches and hunchbacked villains (Leduc, 2020). In all of these cases, the disabled body was seen as less than whole, or as a storytelling device rather than a fully developed character in their own right.

Dowker (2004) argues that at first glance, pre-World War II fiction had two stereotypes for disabled people in literature - either a villain or as the saintly invalid. For the villain, see Captain Hook from *Peter Pan* (1911) whose disability becomes his very name and a thing to fear. For the saintly invalid, look towards Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol* (1843), who provides wisdom beyond his years because of his condition.

In 1994, Kupper, and the then active National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY), created a guide for books written about or with characters that are disabled. While their list was not exhaustive, the very existence of a national organization promoting specific categories of disability showed a drastic change from previous trends in

literature. That is not to say that all of these books have positive displays of disability, with words like "flawed," "weirdo," "crazy." and "lame" being used in the titles (Kupper, 1994, p. 5). In 1977, Baskin and Harris highlighted the fact that just because a book contains a disabled character, does not mean that it is a good representation of the whole child (as cited in Beckett et al., 2010). Only one of the books on this NICHCY list was also in the SEO catalog as of May of 2024, *Alex is My Friend* by Marisabina Russo (1992), so the substance of the text cannot easily be analyzed. Most of the titles listed are no longer in print.

In their 2018 review of children's disability literature, Aho and Alter argued that overall "The representation of disability in children's picture books has long followed the classical tradition of using disabled characters in supporting roles and as foils that reinforce ableist dichotomies central to Western understandings of human worth under patriarchal, racial capitalism" (p. 304). Brittain (2004, para. 16) proposes that in more modern disability fiction, there are six common pitfalls:

1. Portraying the character with an impairment as "other" than human
2. Portraying the character with an impairment as "extra-ordinary"
3. The "second fiddle" phenomenon
4. Lack of realism and accuracy in the portrayal of the impairment
5. The outsider
6. Happy endings?

In general, these common pitfalls all deal with unrealistic portrayals of disabled characters, either treating them as sub-human, extra-ordinary, or an outsider within society. In these cases, disability is often the main personality trait of a character, rather than being a single characteristic of a whole person (Blaska, 2004). While some disabled individuals feel that their disability is a large part of their identity, it will never be their entire identity, as all individuals are complex and multifaceted.

Method

Books were requested from the Serving Every Ohioan (SEO) system, which as of May 2024, was composed of 99 libraries across the state of Ohio. The search terms "disability" and "disabled" were used. Also included were individual disability terms from the IDEA thirteen categories of disability and examples provided by the ADA (U.S. Department of Education, 2018; and U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, n.d.). It is impossible to search for every individually named disability, especially with individual definitions of disability, but efforts were made to find the largest selection available. Selections focused on fiction picture books and early readers, as well as books containing children with disabilities, rather than adults. Books with non-human characters were allowed, only if it was clear from the text that they were portraying child age characters. Baby sign language books were not used, as that form of sign language is not used as part of an expression of disability, but rather for the development of language in typically non-disabled children (Kaplan et al., 2022).

The following categories were noted: author, illustrator, translator, copyright date, publisher, ISBN, language, disability focus, disability main or background of focus, human or non-human characters, narrator focus, BIPOC characters, and Own Voices. While the term "Own Voices" has fallen out of fashion, this shorthand was used to delineate whether or not the book was written by someone with the same disability or disabilities as the main character (Macchia, 2022). It was important to separate out different disability diagnoses to emphasize that disability is not a monolith. As argued by Kaplan et al. (2022, p. 18),

> While other identity markers such as gender, sexual orientation, race, and religion are segregated into separate sub-categories to represent their rightful complexity, "disability" tends to remain unidimensional. The category of

"disability" is as complex as other identity markers and should include cognitive, physical, sensory, and other forms of disability.

Gender was not noted, as gender identity was not always explicit. Previous research found that male portrayals of disability outnumbered female portrayals (Ayala, 1999). Specific race was also not noted, as it was not often made clear in the text, but whether or not the main or background characters were portrayed as People of Color was considered.

Previous Methods. Several methods have been proposed for the analysis of children's picture books with disabled characters including work by Blaska (2003). Blaska (2003, p.199) proposes ten criteria that should be considered when reading or discussing a book:

1. Promotes empathy not pity.
2. Depicts acceptance not ridicule.
3. Emphasizes success rather than, or in addition, to failure.
4. Promotes positive images of persons with disabilities or illness.
5. Assists children in gaining accurate understanding of the disability or illness.
6. Demonstrates respect for persons with disabilities or illness.
7. Promotes attitude of "one of us" not "one of them."
8. Uses language which stresses person first, disability philosophy …
9. Describes the disability or person with disabilities or illness as realistic (i.e., not subhuman or superhuman.)
10. Illustrates characters in a realistic manner.

Not every "good" book is going to have all of these characteristics, but it is important to always ask the basic question of "Would this story embarrass or humiliate a child with a disability?" (Blaska, 2004). This study did not aim to answer each and every one of these questions for every book, but has taken these general themes into consideration.

Results

This study found 162 unique children's fiction picture books. Copyright dates for the books in this study ranged from 1978 to 2024, with the majority (62.7%) being published in the last 10 years. The most frequent copyright year was 2021, with 22 books. The oldest book in the collection was 1978's *Howie Helps Himself*, written by Joan Fassier and illustrated by Joe Lasker, about a young boy with cerebral palsy trying to fit in at a school that is not accommodating.

157 of the selected picture books were in English only, with 5 of those being translated from their original language. One title was written in English and Filipino sign language, one in English and Spanish, and one in English and Tibetan. One unique book, *Maria Throws a Tantrum* (2022), written by Valeria Kiselova Sarvasova and illustrated by Inna Ogando, was written in English and pictograms, which are commonly used in Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices and with children with social processing disorders. While some library catalogs include books written in braille, there were none that satisfied the need of being written about a disabled child.

The most common disability featured was a mobility disability at 34.0% of the titles surveyed. This could mean that the child used a wheelchair or other mobility device, such as a cane, a walker, or a scooter. The next most featured disability was autism at 25.9%. Autism was only noted if explicit in the text, either in the story or the end matter, with other similar disabilities, such as sensory processing disorder (1.2%) and emotional dysregulation (1.2%) also being present. The label "multiple disabilities" (15.4%) was used when the main character had more than one disability or there was no main character but multiple disabilities pictured, such as *We Move Together* (2021) written by Kelly Fritsch, Anne McGuire, and Eduardo Trejos, and illustrated by Eduardo Trejos. The full table with percentages can be found in Appendix 1.

Figure 1: Publication Year Distribution
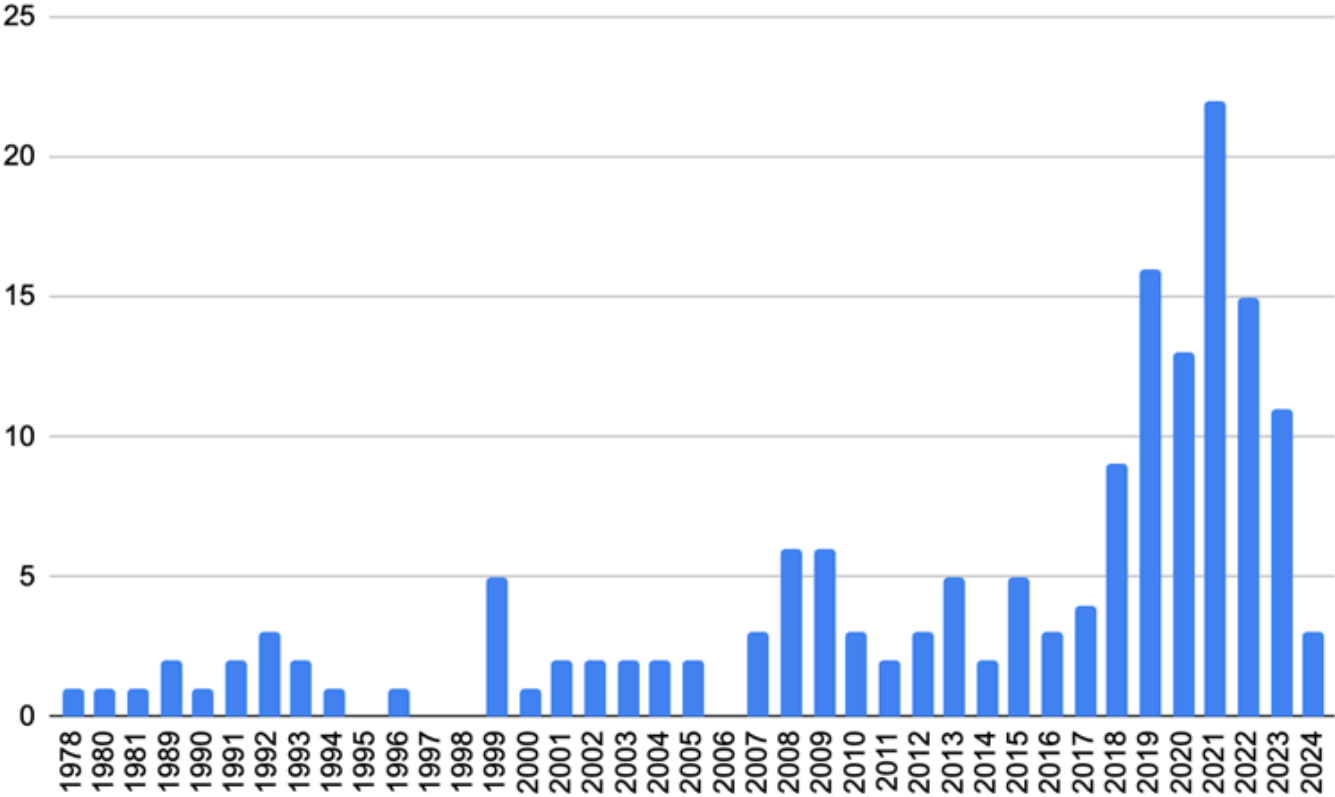
To see if there was intersectional representation, another aspect studied was if there were People of Color characters. Only 8% of books surveyed had a main character that was a Person of Color. In 24.1% of books, both the main character and at least one background character was a Person of Color. In 40.1% of books there were background characters of color. 19.1% had no characters of color at all. These numbers do not include the 8.1% of books with only non-human characters.

The main focus or narrator of each book was also analyzed. 62% had a main character with a disability, as either the narrator or the focus of the story from a narrator. In 11.2% of books, a sibling of a child with a disability was the narrator, while in 15.5% the narrator was a friend. In 1.9% of books, the narrator was an animal, and one book had dual narration focus between an animal and a human, *Rescue & Jessica* (2018) written by Jessica Kensby and Patric Downes, and illustrated by Scott Magoon.

8.1% of titles surveyed had no singular point of view, such as *You Are Enough: A Book About Inclusion* by Margaret O'Hair and illustrated by Sofia Cardoso.

As discussed above, the term "Own Voices" is no longer being used by groups such as We Need Diverse Books, but in a diversity topic such as disability it is important to have books that accurately portray the lived experience of the characters. Only 14.8% of books surveyed were written by people with the same disabilities discussed in the book. This information was typically presented in the forward or endnotes of the text. 85.2% of books were not written by people who identified as disabled in the text. Many of these were written by professionals in the field of disability studies, teachers, and parents. This does not mean that more authors might identify as disabled, only that they did not self-identify within the text.

Limitations of Results. The books surveyed in this study are by no means every book published in the last half century about disability. This study relied upon the 99 lending collections of the SEO consortium across the state of Ohio. This means that the books selected were limited to what librarians in the state of Ohio feel comfortable purchasing, putting on the shelves, and sending out to other libraries. Another limitation is that low-circulated books are weeded after a certain number of years. This could explain why there are many more recent examples of titles than older examples. As this study was completed in the early months of 2024, more applicable books could have been added to the catalog later in the year. A further limitation depended on how each book was tagged in the catalog descriptions and metadata. If the metadata did not mention disability, either in general or a specific condition, it was difficult to find the system. Different collections have different cataloging procedures, which could have limited the survey results.

Discussion

As of May 2024, there were over 8.1 million books in the SEO Library Consortium (SEO, n.d.). Even taking into consideration that many of these books are for adults or are repeat copies, the 162 books surveyed here are a fraction of a fraction of that total collection. Out of this selection, there were some stand out examples both in a positive way and a negative way. As discussed earlier, not every book that features disability is created equal and just because a book discusses disability does not make it laudable. The goal of this study is not to rank books, but to provide examples of what to look for and why.

Relevance to Librarians. Children's literature plays an important role in the socioemotional development of children. Picture books especially help to teach children norms and expectations. As Hayden and Prince argue, respectful and diverse literature can promote acceptance and realistic views, rather than stereotypes or assumptions (2023). In their study of young people's exposure to disability literature, Trepanier-Street and Romantoski

(1996) found that inclusion increases acceptance and positive relationships of disabled children by their non-disabled peers (as cited in Beckett et al., 2010, p. 375). Children are constantly learning, from direct and indirect experiences, about the world around them, and literature can help with awareness of situations that children may not otherwise have exposure to (Meyer, 2021). It is clear that including children with differences and disabilities in literature is important for well-rounded development and future social interactions, but it is also important to remember that that exposure must be respectful and authentic.

As proposed by Rudine Sims Bishop (1990), children's literature has the potential to act as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. All three are vital, especially in disability literature. Windows allow children to see lives other than their own. While more common for non-disabled children, mirror books, where children are able to see their experiences reflected, are just as important for disabled children. To see yourself in the literature you read is powerful. Tejero Hughes and Talley (2024) studied the responses of disabled adult readers to children's disability literature and found that overall, disabled readers wanted to see more authentic and inclusive experiences.

While it is clear from this and previous studies that few picture books include disabled characters, this study also shows that even fewer picture books are written for a disabled reader. There are many disabilities that could benefit from specialized texts, such as a dyslexic friendly font, pictographs, sign language, braille, or hi-low text. Disabled children, no matter their disability, deserve to see themselves accurately and compassionately represented in the literature they read and are exposed to. Future research should be done with a focus on literature for disabled children, not just a non-disabled audience.

Librarians and educators need to take all of this into consideration when developing a well-rounded and respectful collection. There

need to be books about disabled people, books for disabled people, and books that are both. Librarians should look towards award lists, such as the Schneider Family Award, which focuses on the disability experience for children and adolescents, and the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award, which celebrates characters with Autism and other developmental disabilities in children's books. Criteria such as Blaska (2003) or Meyer (2021) should be used to examine individual books.

Positive Examples. At a fundamental level, it is important for disability literature to be accurate and realistic, as to not perpetuate stereotypes (Kingsbury, 2021; Tejero Hughes & Talley, 2024). Books like *Too Sticky: Sensory Issues with Autism* (2020) by Jen Malia and illustrated by Joanne Lew-Vriethoff and *Kendra's Perfect Dance Routine* (2019) by Kendra Gottsleben and illustrated by Carrie Lee Bass present realistic disability experiences that show children as fully rounded characters with both struggles and successes. Both of these books are written by disabled authors with the same disabilities as their characters. *Bodies are Cool* (2021) by Tyler Feder, *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You* (2021) by Sonia Sotomayor and Rafael López, and *The ABCs of Inclusion* (2023) by Beth Leipholtz and illustrated by Anastasiya Kanavaliuk, show multiple disabilities in everyday situations. While none of these three books have a linear pilot, they show a variety of disabilities in a normalizing context. For example, *The ABC's of Inclusion* describes the individual children's likes and dislikes, instead of focusing on struggles, providing a mirror for both disabled and non-disabled children. Books like *A Day With No Words* (2023) by Tiffany Hammond and illustrated by Kate Cosgrove and *I Talk Like a River* (2020) by Jordan Scott and illustrated by Sydney Smith take these ideas further. Both are written by disabled authors seeking to present mirrors for disabled children. They are clear representations of how communication can take many forms and still be valid and valuable.

As Blaska (2003) emphasizes, it is important to show empathy, not pity, and acceptance, not ridicule, when writing about disabled children. The following books go further than awareness and aim to show realistic depictions of disability as parts of everyday life. Books like *Howie Helps Himself* (1978) by Joan Fassler and illustrated by Joe Lasker, *Dancing with Daddy* (2021) by Anitra Rowe Schulte and illustrate by Ziyue Chen, and *Mighty Mara* (2023) by Carina Ho and Jesse Byrd, and illustrated by Mónica Paola Rodríguez, show disabled children as capable, not despite their disability, but in addition to. As suggested by the social model, it is not the fault of the children or of their bodies that there are challenges, but rather the external cultural values and situations that are disabling.

Books like *When Charley Met Emma* (2019) by Amy Webb and illustrated by Merrilee Liddiard and *A Friend for Henry* (2019) by Jenn Bailey and illustrated by Mika Song, go further than empathy and acceptance to friendship and belonging. The new friends are aware of disability, realizing that the disability experience is a part of their friend's life. It is also important to note that these books do not fall into the trope of a disabled child teaching a non-disabled peer a lesson, which can be problematic.

At the core of all good disability representations is respect. Books like *Don't Call Me Special: A First Look at Disability* (2002) by Pat Thomas and *What Happened to You* (2021) by James Catchpole and illustrated by Karen George point out the disrespect and microaggressions faced by disabled people on a regular basis. Books should avoid stereotypes that suggest that disabled children are "special" or fundamentally different at the core because of their disability alone.

Negative Examples. Brittain (2004) proposed several common pitfalls that children's disability literature commonly falls into. These will be used to discuss selected books that are problematic in some nature.

Brittain's (2004) second proposed pitfall is that of extraordinary disabled characters. This was a common trope used in this selection, including *Nathan's Autism Spectrum Powers* (2010) by Lori Leigh Yarborough and illustrated by Natalie Merheb and *Isaac and His Amazing Asperger Superpowers* (2016) by Melanie Wash. These books present unrealistic depictions of disability that diminish the lived experience of disabled children. Even more problematic are the books that imbue magical powers to something the disabled person interacts with or uses as an accessibility device, such as *Mr. Gringle's Magical Wheelchair* (2019) by Natalie Gonchar and illustrated by Eduard Kotz, and *Jimmy's Magical Red Hoodie* (2013) by Rochelle Blee. A book should never dehumanize lived experience. This pattern also relates to the lack of realism pitfall as proposed by Brittain (2004).

A third common pitfall is that of the disabled character being portrayed as a "second fiddle," not fully developed or only to serve as input for other characters to grow (Brittain, 2004). Examples of this include *Be Good to Eddie Lee* (1993) by Virginia Fleming and illustrated by Floyd Cooper, *The Lemonade Ripple* (2012) by Paul Reichert, and *Leah's Voice* (2012) by Lori DeMonia and Monique Turchan. *Leah's Voice* in particular falls into the trap of the narrator speaking for the disabled character instead of letting Leah communicate in her own way. Another common trope in this pitfall is that of the "just like you" phenomenon, such as in *Susan Laughs* (1999) by Jeanne Willis and illustrated by Tony Ross, and *Just a Little Different* (1994) by Bonnie Dobkin and illustrated by Keith Neely. Books like these diminish the real experiences, and real needs, of disabled children by saying that they are just like every other child. In all of these examples, the view of the disabled character is secondary to the main character's growth, which is predicated by only the presence of disability.

Another common pitfall is that of the outsider, where the disabled character is alienated or isolated (Brittain, 2004). Examples of this can be found in books like *Just Because* (2010) by

Rebecca Elliott and *Princess Pooh* (1989) by Kathleen M. Muldoon and illustrated by Linda Shute. This objectification is extremely problematic in perpetuating harmful myths about the lack of agency of disabled individuals.

A pitfall not addressed by Brittain (2004) is that of disabilities hidden within the narrative. Books like *My Ocean is Blue* (2020) by Darren Lebeuf and illustrated by Ashley Barron perpetuate the "just like you" trope as discussed above, as well as suggesting that their disability is not important. The narratives would be the same without the disability that is revealed at the very end, which therefore acts as token representation.

Furthermore, there were several books surveyed that use problematic language and imagery not used by the disabled communities they are representing. *While I am an Aspie Girl: A Book for Young Girls with Autism Spectrum Conditions* (2015) by Danuta Bulhak-Paterson and illustrated by Teresa Ferguson is a much needed representation of girls with autism, its use of "Aspie" and "Aspergers" are now considered problematic in the Autism community (Reece, 2018). Books such as *All My Stripes: A Story for Children with Autism* (2015) by Shaina Rudolph and Danielle Royer, and illustrated by Jennifer Zivoin, and *Jimmy's Magical Red Hoodie* use puzzle piece imagery, which is controversial in the Autism community (A.J. Drexel Autism Institute, 2023). Another problematic thread for some disabled groups is the idea of "curing" the disability. Books like *Joey and Sam* (1993) by Illana Katzs and Edward Ritvo, and illustrated by Franz Borowitz, about a child with autism. It suggests that "getting better" is the goal. Many disabilities are chronic and lifelong conditions that will never be cured. The idea of "fixing" someone with a disability also assumes that something was fundamentally wrong with them in the first place.

Conclusion

In general, disability books have come a long way from the stereotypical portrayals of disability in 19th and early 20th century children's

literature. Even in the books studied, there is a great difference between the books about basic inclusion in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, and the more inclusive books of the 2000s.

Like Hughes (2017), it is important to make note that this sample is limited by what was available in the SEO catalog at the time of research. It is not a comprehensive list, and it does not serve as a direct guide for what librarians should or should not add to their collections. When reviewing disability picture books for a collection or a story time, librarians and educators should consider the context and the content of each individual book for their audience. As Cornejo (2019) asserts, the presence of disability is not enough, it is authentic relationships that matter. Just having a character with a disability in a book is not necessarily inclusive. The book must include and develop the disabled character in the narrative, both within the story and with the reader.

References

Aho, T., & Alter, G. (2018). "Just like me, just like you." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 12(3), 303–319. https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2018.24

A.J. Drexel Autism Institute. (2023, June 30). Autism and identity: Moving beyond the puzzle piece symbol. https://drexel.edu/autisminstitute/news-events/news/2023/June/PuzzlePiece

Ayala, E. C. (1999). "Poor little things" and "brave little souls": The portrayal of individuals with disabilities in children's literature. *Reading Research and Instruction, 39*(1), 103–117.

Bailey, J. (2019). *A friend for Henry* (M. Song, Illus.). Chronicle Books.

Beckett, A., Ellison, N., Barrett, S., & Shah, S. (2010). 'Away with the fairies?' Disability within primary-age children's literature. *Disability & Society, 25*(3), 373–386. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687591003701355

Bishop R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Scenic Regional Library.* https://scenicregional.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Mirrors-Windows-and-Sliding-Glass-Doors.pdf

Blaska, J. K. (2003). *Using children's literature to learn about disabilities and illness* (2nd ed.). Educators International Press, Inc.

Blaska, J. K. (2004). Children's literature that includes characters with disabilities or Illnesses. *Disability Studies Quarterly, 24*(1).

Blee, R. (2013). *Jimmy's magical red hoodie*. Page Publishing.

Brown, L. (n.d.). *Identity-first language*. Autistic Self Advocacy Network. https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/identity-first-language/

Bulhak-Paterson, D. (2015). *I am an Aspie girl: A book for young girls with autism spectrum conditions* (T. Ferguson, Illus.). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Campbell, K. (2006). Selecting children's books about people with disabilities. *Tennessee Libraries, 56*(1).

Catchpole, J. (2021). *What happened to you* (K. George, Illus.). Hachette Book Group.

Cornejo, A. (2019). Representing differences: The portrayal of disabilities in children's literature. *Oneota Reading Journal.*

DeMonia, L. (2012). *Leah's voice* (M. Turchan, Illus.). Halo Publishing International.

Dobkin, B. (1994). *Just a little different* (K. Neely, Illus.). Children's Press.

Dolly Gray award. Dolly Gray Award. (n.d.). https://dollygrayaward.org/

Dowker, A. (2004). The treatment of disability in 19th and early 20th century children's literature. *Disability Studies Quarterly, 24*(1).

Duncan, S. (2011, July 20). *The last word on "person first" language.* The Thinking Person's Guide to Autism. https://web.archive.org/web/20111011094454/http://thinkingautismguide.blogspot.com/2011/07/last-word-on-person-first-language.html

Elliott, R. (2010). *Just because.* Lion Children's Book.

Fassler, J. (1978). *Howie helps himself* (J. Lasker, Illus.). Albert Whitman & Company.

Feder, T. (2021). *Bodies are cool.* Dial Books for Young Readers.

Fleming, V. (1983). *Be good to Eddie Lee* (F. Cooper, Illus.). Philomel Books.

Fritsch, K., McGuire, A., & Trejos, E. (2021). *We move together.* AK Press.

Gonchar, N. (2019). *Mr. Gringle's magical wheelchair* (E. Kotz, Illus.). Brown Books Kids.

Gottsleben, K. (2019). *Kendra's perfect dance routine* (C.L. Bass, Illus.). INCLUDAS Publishing.

Hammond, T. (2023). *A day with no words* (C. Cosgrove, Illus.). Wheat Penny Press.

Hayden, H. E., & Prince, A. M. (2020). Disrupting ableism: Strengths-based representations of disability in children's Picture books. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy, 23*(2), 236–261. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798420981751

Ho, C. & Byrd, J. (2023). *Mighty Mara* (M. Paola Rodríguez, Illus.). Paw Prints Publishing.

Hughes, C. (2017). The "words inside": "Disabled" voices in contemporary literature for young people. *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies, 11*(2), 187–203. https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2017.14

Kaplan, A. G., Tobin, C., Dolcetti, T., & McGowan, J. (2022). Representation matters: Board books with children with disabilities. *Children and Libraries, 20*(3), 15–23. https://doi.org/10.5860/cal.20.3.15

Katzs, I. & Ritvo, E. (1993). *Joey and Sam* (F. Borowitz, Illus.). Real Life Storybooks.

Kensky, J. & Downes, P. (2018). *Rescue & Jessica* (S. Magoon, Illus.). Candlewick Press.

Kingsbury, M. (2021, May 3). *The current state of disability representation in children's books.* BOOK RIOT. https://bookriot.com/disability-representation-in-childrens-books/

Kiselova Savrasova, V. (2022). *Maria throws a tantrum* (I. Ogando, Illus.). Fast Snail Publisher.

Kupper, L. (1994). A guide to children's literature and disability: 1989-1994. Washington, D.C.; National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities.

Lebeuf, D. (2020). *My ocean is blue* (A. Barron, Illus.). Kids Can Press.

Leduc, A. (2020). *Disfigured: On fairy tales, disability, and making space.* Coach House Books.

Leipholtz, B. (2023). *The ABCs of inclusion* (A. Kanavaliuk, Illus.). Wise Ink Creative Publishing.

Liebowitz, C. (2015, March 12). *I am disabled: On identity-first versus people-first language.* The Body Is Not An Apology. https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/i-am-disabled-on-identity-first-versus-people-first-language/

Malia, J. (2020). *Too sticky: Sensory issues with autism* (J. Lew-Vriethoff, Illus.). Albert Whitman & Company.

Macchia, G. (2022, May 18). *Replacing #OwnVoices: Promoting diverse library books with specificity.* We Need Diverse Books. https://diversebooks.org/replacing-ownvoices-promoting-diverse-library-books-with-specificity/

Meyer, L. E. (2021). Including disability in early childhood curricula: Evaluating and using children's books. *Young Children, 76*(4), 29–37

Muldoon, K. M. (1989). *Princess Pooh* (L. Shute, Illus.). Albert Whitman & Company.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2023, May). *Students with disabilities.* https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg/students-with-disabilities

O'Hair, M. (2021). *You are enough: A book about inclusion* (S. Cardoso, Illus.). Scholastic.

Olkin, R. (2022, March 28). *Conceptualizing disability: Three models of disability.* American Psychological Association. https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psychology-teacher-network/introductory-psychology/disability-models

Reese, H. (2018, May 22). *The disturbing history of Dr. Asperger and the Movement to reframe the syndrome.* Vox.

https://www.vox.com/conversations/2018/5/22/17377766/asperger-nazi-rename-syndrome

Reichert, P. (2012). *The lemonade ripple.* Sky Pony Press.

Rowe Schulte, A. (2021). *Dancing with Daddy* (Z. Chen, Illus.). Two Lions.

Rudolph, S. & Royer, D. (2015). *All my stripes: A story for children with autism* (J. Zivoin, Illus.). Magination Press.

Russo, M. (1992). *Alex is my friend.* Greenwillow Books.

Sayers Adomat, D. (2014). Exploring issues of disability in children's literature discussions. *Disability Studies Quarterly, 34*(3).

Schaeffer, K. (2023, July 24). *What federal education data shows about students with disabilities in the U.S.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/07/24/what-federal-education-data-shows-about-students-with-disabilities-in-the-us

Schneider Family Book Award. ALA. (n.d.). https://www.ala.org/awards/books-media/schneider-family-book-award

Scott, J. (2020). *I talk like a river* (S. Smith, Illus.). Neal Porter Books.

SEO. (n.d.). *About the SEO Library Consortium.* SEO Service Center. https://support.servingeveryohioan.org/support/solutions/articles/69000859362

Sinclair, J. (1999). *Why I dislike "person first" language.* Autism MythBusters. https://autismmythbusters.com/general-public/autistic-vs-people-with-autism/jim-sinclair-why-i-dislike-person-first-language/

Sotomayor, S. (2019). *Just ask! Be different, be brave, be you* (R. López, Illus.) Philomel Books.

Tejero Hughes, M., & Talley, C. (2024). Beyond stereotypes: How individuals with disabilities perceive their representation in picture books. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2024.2423053

Thomas, P. (2002). *Don't call me special: A first look at disability.* Barron's Educational Series.

U.S. Department of Education. (2018, May 25). *Sec. 300.8 child with a disability.* Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/a/300.8

U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. (n.d.). *Introduction to the Americans with Disabilities Act.* ADA. https://www.ada.gov/topics/intro-to-ada/

Wash, M. (2016). *Isaac and his amazing Asperger superpower.* Candlewick Press.

Webb, A. (2019). *When Charley met Emma* (M. Liddiard, Illus.). Beaming Books.

Willis, J. (1999). *Susan laughs* (T. Ross, Illus.). Henry Holt and Company.

Yarborough, L. L. (2010). *Nathan's autism spectrum superpowers* (N. Merheb, Illus.). One Three Nine Inspired.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Count of Disability Focus

Disability	Count	Percentage
Alopecia	1	0.62%
Autism	41	25.31%
Cerebral Palsy	2	1.23%
Deafness	5	3.09%
Down Syndrome	5	3.09%
Dwarfism	1	0.62%
Dyslexia	3	1.85%
Emotional Dysregulation	2	1.23%
Limb Difference	7	4.32%
Mobility Disability	55	33.95%
Multiple Disabilities	25	15.43%
Neurodiverse	1	0.62%
Sensory Processing Disorder	2	1.23%
Social Disability	1	0.62%
Speech Disorder	1	0.62%

26

Spina Bifida	2	1.23%
Visual Impairment	8	4.94%
Wolf Hirschhorn Syndrome	1	0.62%

Appendix 2: Books Surveyed

Title	Author	Illustrator	Translated	Copyright	Publisher
A Case of the Can-Dos!	Jill Keppeler	Rachel Dinunzio		2021	Windmill Books
A Day With No Words	Tiffany Hammond	Kate Cosgrove		2023	Wheat Penny Press
A Friend for Henry	Jenn Bailey	Mika Song		2019	Chronicle Books
A Friend Like Simon	Kate Gaynor	Caitríona Sweeney		2009	Special Stories Publishing
A Head Full of Birds	Alexandra Garibal	Sibylle Delacroix	Vineet Lal	2022	Eerdmans Books for Young Readers
A Story About Courage	Joel Vercere	Benton Mahan		1992	Steck-Vaughn Company
A Very Special Critter	Gina and Mercer Mayer	Gina and Mercer Mayer		1992	Golden Book
A Wheel Life Lesson	Noel Gyro Potter	Joseph Cannon		2019	Magic Wagon
Alex Is My Friend	Marisabina Russo	Marisabina Russo		1992	Greenwillow Books
Ali and the Sea Stars	Ali Stroker	Gillian Reid		2022	HarperCollins Children's Books
All Kinds of Friends, Even Green!	Ellen B. Senisi	Ellen B. Senisi		2002	Woodbine House
All My Stripes: A Story for Children with Autism	Shaina Rudolph and Danielle Royer	Jennifer Zivoin		2015	Magination Press

Andy and His Yellow Frisbee	Mary Thompson	Mary Thompson		1996	Woodbine House
Antonino's Impossible Dream	Tim McGlen	Sophia Touliatou		2019	Beaming Books
Arnie and the New Kid	Nancy Carlson	Nancy Carlson		1990	Viking
Awesomely Emma: A Charley and Emma Story	Amy Webb	Merrilee Liddiard		2020	Beaming Books
Baking Up a Storm	Jessica Parham	Srimalie Bassani		2022	Mascot Kids
Be Good to Eddie Lee	Virginia Fleming	Floyd Cooper		1993	Philomel Books
Ben's Adventures Under the Big Top	Elizabeth Gerlach	Stephanie Hider		2019	CharleyHouse Press
Benji, The Bad Day, and Me	Sally J. Pla	Ken Min		2018	Lee & Low Books
Best Day Ever	Marilyn Singer	Leah Nixon		2021	Clarion Books
Best Friend on Wheels	Debra Shirley	Judy Stead		2014	Av2 by Weigl
Bo and Peter	Betsy Franco	Stacey Schuett		1994	Scholastic Inc.
Bodies are Cool	Tyler Feder	Tyler Feder		2021	Dial Books for Young Readers
Boo's Beard	Rose Mannering	Bethany Straker		2015	Sky Pony Press
Brandon Spots His Sign	Sheletta Brundidge and Lily Coyle	Darcy Bell-Myers		2022	Beaver's Pond Press
Caillou Meets Sophie: A Story About Autism	Kim Thompson	Mario Allard		2019	Chouette Publishing
Can Bears Ski?	Raymond Antrobus	Polly Dunbar		2020	Candlewick Press
Can I Play Too?	Samantha Cotterill	Samantha Cotterill		2020	Dial Books for Young Readers
Come Over to My House	Eliza Hull and Sally Ripin	Daniel Gray-Barnett		2022	Bright LIght

Title	Author	Illustrator	Translator	Year	Publisher
Dancing Hands: A Story of Friendship in Filipino Sign Language	Joanna Que and Charina Marquez	Fran Alvarez	Karen Llagas	2020	Chronicle Books
Dancing with Daddy	Anitra Rowe Schulte	Ziyue Chen		2021	Two Lions
David's World: A Picture Book about Living with Autism	Dagmar H. Mueller	Verena Ballhaus		2012	Sky Pony Press
Different - A Great Thing to Be!	Heather Avis	Sarah Mensinga		2021	Waterbrook
Don't Call Me Special: A First Look at Disability	Pat Thomas	Pat Thomas		2002	Barron's Educational Series
Dragon and His Friend: A Dragon Book About Autism	Steve Herman	Steve Herman		2019	DG Books Publishing
Emily's Big Shot	Bryan Patrick Avery	Arief Putra		2022	Capstone
Everybody Has a Body	Molli Jackson Ehlert	Lorian Tu		2023	Feiwel and Friends
Featherless / Desplumado	Juan Felipe Herrera	Ernesto Cuevas, Jr.		2004	Children's Book Press
Four Bad Unicorns	Rebecca Patterson	Rebecca Patterson		2024	Andersen Press
Gary's Gigantic Dream	Dr. Nicole Julia	Jeff Crowther		2019	Able Fables Book Company
Good Night, Commander	Ahmad Akbarpour	Morteza Zahedi	Shadi Eskandani and Helen Mixter	2005	Groundwood Books
Harley the Hero	Peggy Collins	Peggy Collins		2021	Pajama Press Inc
Hello Goodbye Dog	Maria Gianferrari	Patrice Barton		2017	Roaring Brook Press
Helping Sophia	Anastasia Suen	Jeff Ebbeler		2008	Abdo Publishing
Henry the Boy	Molly Felder	Nate Christopherson and Tara Sweeney		2019	Penny Candy Books

Henry, Like Always	Jenn Bailey	Mika Song		2023	Chronicle Books
Here Comes Kate	Judy Carlson	Gordon Kibbee		1989	American Teacher Publications
Hi, my name is Austin and I have Autism	Selina Jackson	Keenan Hopson		2021	Unknown
Howie Helps Himself	Joan Fassler	Joe Lasker		1978	Albert Whitman & Company
Hunter Bunny Saves Easter	Alexis Rae Weaver	Jennifer M. Kohnke		2001	Golden Bunny Publishing
I am an Aspie Girl: A book for young girls with autism spectrum conditions	Danuta Bulhak-Paterson	Teresa Ferguson		2015	Jessica Kingsley Publishers
I am Deaf	Jennifer Moore-Mallinos	Marta Fàbrega		2009	Barron's Educational Series
I Choose Yellow	Emily Casey and Alyssa King	Evie German		2019	Whatevie LLC
I Don't Like Birthday Parties	Maureen Gaspari	Siski Kalla		2021	An Upside Down Book
I Love Vincent	Laura Ljungkvist	Laura Ljungkvist		2021	POW!
I See You See	Richard Jackson	Patrice Barton		2021	Atheneum Books for Young Readers
I Talk Like a River	Jordan Scott	Sydney Smith		2020	Neal Porter Books
I Will Dance	Nancy Bo Flood	Julianna Swaney		2020	Atheneum Books for Young Readers
If I Was A Pirate	Margaret Salter	Margaret Salter		2021	Crabtree Publishing Company

In Another Person's Shoes	Cynthia Phillipson	Dan Drewes	2015	AuthorHouse
Isaac and His Amazing Asperger Superpower	Melanie Wash	Melanie Wash	2016	Candlewick Press
It Was Supposed to Be Sunny	Samantha Cotterill	Samantha Cotterill	2021	Dial Books for Young Readers
It's OK to Be Me! Just Like You, I Can Do Almost Anything	Jennifer Moore-Mallinos	Marta Fàarega	2007	Barron's Educational Services
It's Okay to Ask: A Book About Disabilities	Abbie Isaac	Emeline Humphries	2023	Mascot Kids
Jake's New Friend	Crystal Bowman	Karen Maizel	2008	Zonder Kids
Jimmy's Magical Red Hoodie	Rochelle Blee	Rochelle Blee	2013	Page Publishing
Joey and Sam	Illana Katzs and Edward Ritvo, M.D.	Franz Borowitz	1993	Real Life Storybooks
Just a Little Different	Bonnie Dobkin	Keith Neely	1994	Children's Press
Just Ask	Sonia Sotomayor	Rafael López	2019	Philomel Books
Just Because	Rebecca Elliott	Rebecca Elliott	2010	Lion Children's Book
Katie Can: A Story About Special Needs	Erin Palmer	John Joseph	2019	Rourke Educational Media
Kendra's Perfect Dance Routine	Kendra Gottsleben	Carrie Lee Bass	2019	INCLUDAS Publishing
King for a Day	Rukhsana Khan	Christiane Krömer	2013	Lee & Low Books
Leah's Voice	Lori DeMonia	Monique Turchan	2012	Halo Publishing International
Leo and the Octopus	Isabelle Marinov	Chris Nixon	2021	Kane Miller

Lex Leads the Way	Danny Jordan	Agustina Perciante		2022	Stretch Run Media
Like Me: A Story About Disability and Discovering God's Image in Every Person	Laura Wifler	Skylar White		2022	Harvest House Publishers
Logan's Greenhouse	JaNay Brown-Wood	Samara Hardy		2022	Peachtree Publishing Company
Looking after Louis	Lesley Ely	Polly Dunbar		2004	Albert Whitman & Company
Looking Out for Sarah	Glenna Lang	Glenna Lang		2001	Charlesbridge
Louie's Together Playground	Dr. Nicole Julia	Jeff Crowther		2021	Able Fables Book Company
Lucas Makes a Comeback	Igor Plohl	Urska Stropnik Sonc	Zalozba Pivec and Kristina Alice Walker	2014	Holiday House
Maria Throws a Tantrum	Valeria Kiselova Savrasova	Inna Ogando		2022	Fast Snail Publisher
Masterpiece	Alexandra Hoffman	Beatriz Mello		2022	Wishing Star Publishing
Max the Champion	Sean Stockdale and Alexandra Strick	Ros Asquith		2013	Janetta Otter-Barry Books
Max's Fun Day	Adria F. Klein	Mernie Gallagher-Cole		2007	Picture Window Books
Me and My Sister	Rose Robbins	Rose Robbins		2020	Eerdmans Books for Young Readers
Meeting Mimi: A Story About Different Abilities	Francie Dolan	Wendy Leach		2020	Rourke Educational Media

Mighty Mara	Carina Ho and Jesse Byrd	Mónica Paola Rodríguez		2023	Paw Prints Publishing
Mikey: A Day at school through the eyes of a child with Autism	Mindee Pinto and Judy Cohen			2013	Orange Hat Publishing
Molly Tells the World: A book about Dyslexia and Self-Esteem	Krista Weltner	Krista Weltner		2024	Free Spirit Publishing
Mr. Gringle'a Magical Wheelchair	Natalie Gonchar	Eduard Kotz		2019	Brown Books Kids
My Brother Charlie	Holly Robinson Peete and Ryan Elizabeth Peete and Denene Millner	Shane W. Evans		2010	Scholastic Press
My Brother is Autistic	Jennifer Moore-Mallinos	Marta Fabrega		2008	Barron's Educational Series
My Brother Sammy is Special	Becky Edwards	David Armitage		1999	Sky Pony Press
My Friend Isabelle	Eliza Woloson	Bryan Gough		2003	Woodbine House
My Friend with Autism	Beverly Bishop	Craig Bishop		2011	Future Horizons
My Ocean is Blue	Darren Lebeuf	Ashley Barron		2020	Kids Can Press
My Three Best Friends and Me, Zulay	Cari Best	Vanessa Brantley-Newton		2015	Farrar Straus Giroux Books for Young Readers
Nathan's Autism Spectrum Superpowers	Lori Leigh Yarborough	Natalie Merheb		2010	One Three Nine Inspired
Next Door	Deborah Kerbel	Isaac Liang		2023	Kids Can Press
Nice Wheels	Gwendolyn Hooks	Renee Andriani		2005	Children's Press

Nick Joins In	Joe Lasker	Joe Lasker		1980	General Publishing Limited
Obioma Plays Football	Chika Unigwe	Chinyere Okoroafor		2023	Cassava Republic Press
Out Into the Big Wide Lake	Paul Harbridge	Josée Bisaillon		2021	Tundra Books
Outside Amelia's Window	Caroline Nastro	Anca Sandu Budisan		2023	Two Lions
Paddy's First Day at Hilltop School	Sean Rooney	Kalpart Team		2009	Strategic Book Publishing
Pandora's Phone	Elizabeth Catanese	Benedetta Capriotti		2022	Magic Wagon
Perfectly and Wonderfully made	trevor Lane	Ateffi Andrat Faria		2022	Kindle Digital Publishing
Playing by the Rules: A Story About Autism	Dena Fox Luchsinger	Julie Olson		2007	Woodbine House
Princess Pooh	Kathleen M. Muldoon	Linda Shute		1989	Albert Whitman & Company
Puppies for Sale	Dan Clark	Jerry Dillingham		1999	Dalmation Press
Rae's First Day	Danny Jordan	Austina Perciante		2021	The Capables LLC
Remarkable Remy: My Autistic Friend	Melanie Heyworth	Nathaniel Eckstrom		2023	Bright Light
Rescue & Jessica	Jessica Kensky and Patrick Downes	Scott Magoon		2018	Candlewick Press
Rolling Along with Goldilocks and the Three Bears	Cindy Meyers	Carol Morgan		1999	Woodbine House
Roxy the Raccoon	Alice Reeves	Phoebe Kirk		2018	Jessica Kingsley Publishers
Sam's Super Seats	Keah Brown	Sharee Miller		2022	Kokila

34

Silent Lotus	Jeanne M. Lee	Jeanne M. Lee		1991	Farrar, Straus & Giroux
Special People, Special Ways	Arlene Maguire	Sheila Bailey		2020	Future Horizons
Squirmy Wormy: How I Learned to Help Myself	Lynda Farrington Wilson	Lynda Farrington Wilson		2009	Sensory World
Stewie Boom! and Princess Penelope: Handprints, Snowflakes, and Play-dates	Christine Bronstein	Karen L. Young		2018	Nothing But The Truth
Susan Laughs	Jeanne Willis	Tony Ross		1999	Henry Holt and Company
Talking is Not My Thing	Rose Robbins	Rose Robbins		2020	Eerdmans Books for Young Readers
Ten Other Things About Me: A Book Featuring Daelin and His Wheelchair	Anne Ricard Merritt	Anne Ricard Merritt		2021	Dewdrops and Daisies Books
Ten Other Things About Me: A Book Featuring Kyah and Her Leg Braces	Ann Ricard Merritt	Anne Ricard Merritt		2021	Dewdrops and Daisies Books
The A in Autism Stands for Awesome	Lindsay James	Jamie Wolenter		2016	Bobo Books
The ABCs of Inclusion	Beth Leipholtz	Anastasiya Kanavaliuk		2023	Wise Ink Creative Publishing
The Adventure of Bug and Boo Under the Sea	Denay Hooks	Denay Hooks		2018	AuthorHouse
The Balancing Girl	Berniece Rabe	Lillian Hoban		1981	Elsevier-Dutton
The Black Book of Colors	Menena Cottin	Rosana Faría	Elisa Amado	2008	Groundwood Books

The Boy with Big, Big Feelings	Britney Winn Lee	Jacob Souva		2019	Beaming Books
The Chalk Rainbow	Deborah Kelly	Gwynneth Jones		2017	Exisle Publishing
The Lemonade Ripple	Paul Reichert	Paul Reichert		2012	Sky Pony Press
The Mermaid With No Tail	Jessica Long	Airin O'Callaghan		2023	Sounds True
The Perfect Project: A Book About Autism	Dr. Tracy Packiam Alloway	Ana Sanfelippo		2019	Quarto Publishing
The Push: A Story of Friendship	Patrick Gray	Justin Skeesuck and Matt Waresak		2018	Tyndale
The Right Move: An Autistic Boy Brings His Class Together Through the Game of Chess	Jason Powe	Jason Powe		2022	Paw Prints Publishing
The Scooter Twins	Dorothy Ellen Palmer	Maria Sweeney		2024	Groundwood Books
Thoughtful: Discovering the Unique Gifts in Each of Us	Dorena Williamson	Robert Dunn		2008	B&H Publishing Group
Thukpa For All	Praba Ram and Sheela Preuitt	Shilpa Ranade		2018	Karadi tales Company
Tom's Special Talent	Kate Gaynor	Eva Byrne		2009	Special Stories Publishing
Too Sticky: Sensory Issues with Autism	Jen Malia	Joanne Lew-Vriethoff		2020	Albert Whitman & Company
Uniquely Brave	Trace Wilson	Ana Sebastian		2017	Mascot Books
Uniquely Wired: A Story about Autism and its Gifts	Julia Cook	Anita DuFalla		2018	Boys Town Press
Waiting for Benjamin: A Story about Autism	Alexandra Jessum Altman	Susan Keeter		2008	Albert Whitman & Company

We Move Together	Kelly Fritsch, Anne McGuire, and Eduardo Trejos			2021	AK Press
What About Me? A book by and for an Autism Sibling	Breanne Farmer and Mandy Farmer	Emily Neff		2017	Farmer Publishing
What Happened to You	James Catchpole	Karen George		2021	Hachette Book Group
What's Silly Hair Day with No Hair	Norene Paulson	Camila Carrossine		2021	Albert Whitman & Company
When Charley Met Emma	Amy Webb	Merrilee Liddiard		2019	Beaming Books
Why Are You Looking At Me? I Just Have Down Syndrome	Lisa Tompkins	Ryan Eubanks		2013	Author House
Why Does Izzy Cover Her Ears? Dealing with Sensory Overload	Jennifer Veenendall	Jennifer Veenendall		2009	AAPC
Why Johnny Doesn't Flap: NT is OK!	Clay Morton and Gail Morton	Alex Merry		2016	Jessica Kingsley Publishers
With the Wind	Liz Damrell	Stephen Marchesi		1991	Orchard Books
Woodpecker Girl	Chingyen Liu and I-Tsun Chiang	Heidi Doll		2020	Reycraft Books
Yes I Can! A Girl and Her Wheelchair	Kendra J. Barrett, Jacqueline B. Toner, and Claire A. B. Freeland	Violet Lemay		2018	Magination Press
You Are Enough: A Book About Inclusion	Margaret O'Hair	Sofia Cardoso		2021	Scholastic

You Can Be a Friend	Tony Dungy and Lauren Dungy	Ron Mazellan		2011	Little Simon Inspirations
You've Got a Friend	Joni Eareckson Tada	Jeff Meyer		1999	Crossway Books
Zoom!	Robert Munsch	Michael Martchenko		2003	Scholastic, Cartwheel Books

Behind the Desk: Washington State Community and Technical College Librarians' and Library Workers' Perspectives on Student Reference Needs during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Catherine Jensen, University of Washington iSchool
Liliana Jones,University of Washington iSchool
Annie Sirski, University of Washington iSchool

Abstract

Across Washington State, community and technical college librarians and library workers struggled to meet student reference needs as they grappled with swift and often detrimental changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic—which we define as the period between March 2020 and 2021, in keeping with return-to-campus trends of Washington State higher education institutions. Through a framework of the authors' backgrounds and experiences along with the existing literature, this article situates the impact of COVID-19 in the broader context of academic reference pre- and post-pandemic. This article likewise examines prominent issues COVID-19 brought to the fore and trends that persisted through the end of 2022, when we conducted our research. The authors highlight the gap in this research area to demonstrate and better understand the many challenges Washington State students encounter in their pursuit of higher education, to promote the study of community and technical colleges more broadly, and to shed light on the challenges librarians and library workers continue to wrestle with in 2025.

Keywords: Reference, Washington State, Librarians, Library Workers, COVID-19, Pandemic, Community College, Technical College

Article Type: Research Paper

Introduction

Whose points of view are missing in our retrospective of the COVID-19 pandemic and how do the effects of the pandemic continue to impact librarians and library workers? As former community college students in Washington State and recent MLIS graduates at the University of Washington, we were drawn to these questions and how they might be answered by the librarians and library workers we've encountered on our paths.

In Washington, community and technical colleges scrambled to meet their students' reference needs in spring 2020 as education pivoted online and health risks heightened. While those colleges have since returned to a new sense of normalcy, librarians' and library workers' perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 on student reference needs is a rich pool of knowledge—one that yields invaluable insight into a population that is often overlooked in academic research.

In autumn 2022, we conducted research through interviews with librarians and library workers, a

Likert scale questionnaire, and an analysis of community and technical college websites. The main objective of this study was to understand the evolution of community and technical college student reference needs as a result of the pandemic and how that evolution continues to impact us moving forward. However, we also stumbled upon findings surrounding the impacts on reference service models and availability, academic librarians' identities and job security in the changing landscape, and the role of technology, tutor center models, and faculty collaboration at these colleges.

We are researchers privileged to have attended a graduate studies program that empowered our efforts. Though we have experience studying and working in community colleges, our ability to deeply understand students from diverse and intersectional backgrounds is limited. As students, we did not have the means to conduct a full study and interview community college students. We must qualify the following paper by reminding readers that our findings are framed through the lens of librarians, library workers, and their online materials. Academically speaking, our research is founded on critical theory. We do not hold that social science can be truly objective; instead, we strive to identify and challenge power dynamics and inequities at every turn. We hope that as Washingtonians, we were able to build trust with those who informed our research. However, we must acknowledge that the response to COVID-19 varied significantly across the state, particularly among political party lines. Our identities as "Western Washington residents" and affiliation with UW may have influenced our outlook and how we were perceived regarding the pandemic.

Existing research

The following section summarizes pertinent existing research that contributed to the formation of our approach across three core themes.

Much of the focus on COVID-19's impact on education and academic libraries has been on

four-year universities: As Nelson (2017) states: "The role of the community college library is underrepresented in the literature" (p. 278). However, some commonalities can be drawn. Connell et al. (2021) raise an important point in their study of three academic libraries about the difficulty in measuring interaction trends, especially in libraries where logging patron-librarian interactions may not have been as robust prior to the pandemic. They highlight that during the height of the pandemic, "no longer could students catch library staff in the stacks or at a service desk to ask quick—and often uncounted—questions. Instead, interactions were more easily measured through the virtual trails they left behind" (p. 17). However, the focus on academic libraries of four-year institutions, particularly universities who focus primarily on research, creates a gap in our understanding of how academic libraries of two-year colleges fared during the pandemic.

Community and technical college students have unique reference needs: There has been some research assessing how academic librarians can meet the reference needs of community and technical college students. Community colleges "educate a large number of students that may not traditionally attend a four-year college or university" (Nelson, 2017, p. 278). Not surprisingly, community college students have diverse backgrounds and encounter numerous barriers in their pursuit of higher education. Lacy and Hamlett (2021) noted that community college students in America generally hail from low-income backgrounds and "they are mostly minorities; they are mostly first-generation college students; and, importantly, they are almost all in need of some kind of remediation" (p. 167). Krieb (2018) affirms the positive impact librarians can have on community college students, and found that "students that visited the reference desk or attended a library instruction class had higher rates of retention" and tended to have a higher course grade (p. 3). There is also emerging research surrounding strategies for reference services in community colleges. Kramer (2020) researched a model called roving reference, described as "engaging

the patron at the point of need" (p. 272), and Lacy and Hamlett (2021) sought to scale information literacy and research skills through faculty partnerships (p. 173). Both of these authors emphasize the importance of creative approaches in best serving community and technical college students.

Librarians have begun assessing the impact of the pandemic: A few institutional assessments on the impact of COVID-19, led by community college librarians, are available. Cohn and Hyams (2021) documented two New York community college libraries' response to the pandemic, including the tactical emergency response decisions that took place, such as a setting up virtual reference chat within a matter of days and updating library websites and reference resources. Fancher and Mabee (2022) investigated the delivery of reference services in high-stress times at a Missouri technical college, and refute a common pedagogy that reference services must be student-led in order to be impactful: "To riff on an adage, forcing a student to learn how to fish when they are drowning helps no one" (p. 224). Bouchard (2021) discusses a Michigan Tribal community college focused on supporting students with career and employment research. Methods included lengthy email threads between students and libraries, socially distant interactions in the school parking lot, and increased utilization of job-seeking software on the library website. While this study veers away from traditional reference services, it demonstrates the variety of creative measures librarians took during this time. Blankstein and Wolff-Eisenberg (2021) conducted a broad study of library directors in 2021 and reported a perception that community college libraries played an increasingly important role in providing technology and digital skills to students. In comparing these profiles of community college academic libraries, access to technology, adaptability in delivery of reference services, and variety of connection points with students were key to success in meeting student needs.

Definitions

Based on our review of existing literature, we noted several definitions that required specification because they informed the parameters of our study.

We use the term *COVID-19* as described by Johns Hopkins Medical Center: "A coronavirus identified in 2019, SARS-CoV-2, has caused a pandemic of respiratory illness, called COVID-19" (2022). We define the COVID-19 pandemic as the period between March 2020 through 2021; this reflects the return-to-campus trends of western Washington higher education institutions, with the majority returning to campus in early 2022 if not slightly before (Green River College, 2022; Gutman, 2022; MyNorthwest, 2021). Similar to other literature on the subject, our autumn 2022 research was conducted in a period that could not be considered definitively "post-pandemic."

The Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), a division of the American Library Association (ALA), provides a useful starting point to define *reference services* as "providing assistance by using expertise in response to an information need" (RUSA, 2022). In addition to these baseline definitions, researchers asked interview subjects how they personally defined the milestones of the COVID-19 pandemic and reference to frame the qualitative data gathered. Since the literature we reviewed placed a large emphasis on the critical shift to online and virtual services during the COVID-19 pandemic, we paid special attention to librarians' and library workers' perspectives on this shift and incorporated analysis of it into our research method.

Like many places in the United States, Washington's digital divide became apparent during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The need for *digital equity*, defined by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance as "a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and

economy," became impossible to ignore as residents were unable to address basic needs without technology and internet access (n.d.). NDIA defines the digital divide as "the gap between those who have affordable access, skills, and support to effectively engage online and those who do not." As late as June 2023, approximately 15% of Washington households did not have high speed internet access (Washington State Department of Commerce, 2023, p. 78). Rural communities were particularly affected: in the "counties of Ferry, Skamania, Okanogan, Adams, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Columbia and Klickitat, at least 4 in 5 survey respondents reported no internet access or broadband service" (Yoon-Hendricks, 2023). As noted in a report by the Association of Community College Trustees, "Even after the pandemic abates, the digital divide will remain a significant hurdle for many students throughout the United States, reducing access to education and discouraging some students from persisting and completing" (Bray, 2021, p. 7). One example of this gap can be found in the Spokane Community College District, where "Fifteen percent (15%) of students did not have adequate access to the technology necessary to continue their studies virtually" at the beginning of the lockdown (p. 4).

Objective and Methods

Bringing together our review of existing literature and the defining features of our focus of study, our primary goals for conducting this research were to:

- Qualitatively study the impact of COVID-19 on student reference needs
- Gather perceptions of how these needs were observed and perceived by librarians and library workers
- Look critically at the connections between students, librarians, library workers, and academic institutions, the ongoing challenges facing community and technical colleges, and questions that were left unanswered

Our research method was three-fold: interviews with community and technical college librarians from Washington State's community and technical colleges, a questionnaire seeking responses from those librarians and library workers, and comprehensive analysis of the websites. Interviews and the questionnaire were deployed concurrently, and website analysis was completed independently by the researchers. We developed a codebook to analyze the qualitative data obtained. Themes, like changes in service and needs before, during, and after COVID-19, were identified for the codebook prior to data collection, while specific coding methods were assigned once data collection was complete and patterns could be identified.

Interviews. We conducted 17 interviews over Zoom virtual meetings with librarians from 16 of the 34 Washington State community and technical colleges as identified by the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (2022). Interviews were conducted from November 4, 2022 to November 11, 2022, averaging about 27 minutes long. The interviews were semi-structured following a standard set of questions prepared by the researchers (see Appendix A) with flexibility built into the timing of the interview for participants to expand on answers or bring up other topics during the interview as they organically came up. During interviews, we quickly discovered the importance of discerning librarian and library worker perceptions from the measurable impact of the pandemic on student reference needs.

Questionnaire. We received 22 responses from our questionnaire that was emailed to the 34 community and technical libraries. The questionnaire sought responses from both librarians and library workers with the understanding that other library professionals, like technicians and assistants, play a valuable role in the community and technical college library ecosystem. As such, we sought their input in regards to the above research goals through a Likert scale questionnaire (see Appendix B). Responses were solicited from November 1, 2022 to November 14, 2022.

Website Analysis. During November 2022, we analyzed all 34 colleges' websites using a rubric created by the researchers that assessed the following:

- Presence of library site within the main homepage of the college
- COVID-19 information, policies, and resources
- Available reference services, including in-person and virtual resources
- General information and library updates
- Student feedback options
- Language accessibility

The purpose of this analysis was to analyze the information and dissemination of that information by the library and academic institution to the student population and academic community. It further provided contextual information to the data gathered from the interviews and questionnaires.

Bringing together the data we gathered through these instruments, we coded the results and synthesized them into themes, as described below.

Findings

In the following summary of our findings, we note librarians and library worker general perceptions to establish context. We then share the primary findings related to student needs. Finally, we list library responses to these identified student needs.

Theme 1: Librarian and library worker perceptions

Impact of the pandemic. *"A great majority of the meetings are happening online."*

- **Online education landscape:** The move to increased online services was already on the horizon at many Washington State community and technical colleges prior to the pandemic. The nature of COVID-19

expedited that process, however, bringing to the forefront the systemic inequitable structure of higher education institutions and the role libraries play in disrupting the status quo.
- **Open Educational Resources (OER)**: Online classes dominated across Washington State in 2020 and 2021 and comprised a significant portion of student enrollment. Countless online workshops, seminars, and events likewise grew in popularity. Unsurprisingly, OER became a prominent focus for everyone, including staff and faculty who sought to prioritize access to materials. While a shift toward online services started prior to the pandemic, COVID-19 propelled that shift, centering equity issues like never before.
- *Modalities*: Librarians and library workers perceived a major shift in student expectations concerning the mode through which reference services could and would be provided. As campuses closed across the state, librarians and library workers had to quickly pivot from broadly offering a combination of online and in-person reference support to providing online services exclusively. This included setting up or ramping up service via one or more dedicated chat platforms to facilitate conversations between librarians and students in addition to more traditional communication routes such as email. Later, particularly in 2021 as hybrid services began to emerge and even as campuses began to offer a large number of in-person services once more, librarians reported continued student expectations of and engagement in digital reference services.
- **Enrollment**: Librarians and library workers deployed outreach services to remedy a drop in student enrollment and promote a global network as students predominantly completed classes remotely.

Institutional role. *"You get concerned … when you see, like a whole line of people like*

secretaries or administrative assistance disappear. You wonder if you're going to also sort of disappear in this function."

- **Librarian value:** Librarians increasingly felt the need to justify their value to colleges as the number of reference questions they received plummeted; this trend was particularly concerning amidst budget and staffing cuts. In response to this dip and widespread student expectations of online services, librarians began creating a plethora of digital materials as well as teaching online courses.
- **Siloed workplaces:** Librarians reported that they severely lacked insight into similar colleges' responses to the pandemic and would have welcomed collaboration between institutions. Though the issue of siloed workplaces existed before COVID-19 and the Library Leadership Council was engaging in efforts to remedy this shortcoming, it was nonetheless felt far and wide.
- **Risk-taking:** We observed additional divides between library staff that were able to work from home (often based on union influence) and those who were required to work in-person during the height of the pandemic. Both groups faced a steep learning curve in acquiring and teaching digital skills, and each faced unique challenges.

Challenges in meeting student reference needs. *"When students are in the library and they're face to face, the reference transaction is different."*

- **Student reluctance:** Librarians reported that students were generally reluctant to engage with them in person prior to COVID-19 and that the dramatic shift to an online modality exacerbated their reluctance; this held true even as campuses started to reintroduce in-person services. Due to fewer in-person interactions, reference transactions

became even less research-oriented and more basic (e.g., help with printing).

- **Cost:** Librarians grappled with supporting students, faculty, and staff using e-resources as they can be expensive to purchase and maintain and sometimes difficult to use. Their content can also change without warning, creating additional barriers. Further, the increased need for technology by students and expansion of technology lending programs increased costs.

Challenges regarding outreach. *"Where are the students? And why don't they know that we're here?"*

- **Faculty**: According to librarians, the pandemic shed light on the importance of outreach to students as well as faculty. Librarians urged the latter to begin to or to further incorporate library services into course curricula to better assist students and convey the scaffolded nature of research skills.
- **Library as a third place**: As "connectors" between students and campus, faculty, staff, and more, librarians began to embrace the notion of a library as a "third place" for students to interact, dialogue, and learn. Rather than their traditional reputation as quiet spaces for studying (and little socialization), dynamic libraries have begun to attract students who seek a more diverse support network and robust services.
- **Social work**: COVID-19 pushed librarians to prioritize addressing students holistically, particularly meeting students' basic needs such as food, housing, and Internet. Concerns surrounding information literacy and library services increased during this time, with college and career success courses—or proposals for such courses—receiving additional support as a way to cultivate long-term student success.

Meeting student reference needs. *"So [COVID-19]s an opportunity to rethink: Okay, what does this group of people who are in front of us right now—what do they want and need?"*

According to questionnaire results (seen below in Figures 1 and 2), community and technical college academic librarians' confidence in their ability to meet student reference needs appeared to dip somewhat during COVID-19 compared to prior to COVID-19, despite receiving adequate training. These Google Forms graphs show a dip in librarians' confidence to meet student reference needs.

Prior to COVID-19, I felt confident in my ability to meet reference needs
22 responses

Figure 1.

During COVID-19, I felt confident in my ability to meet reference needs
22 responses
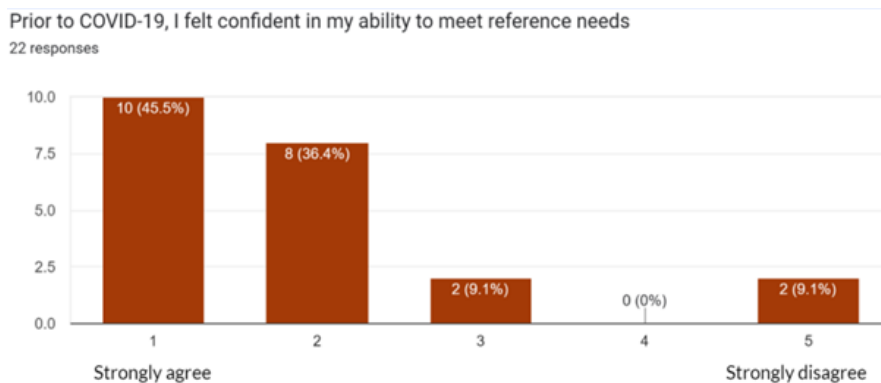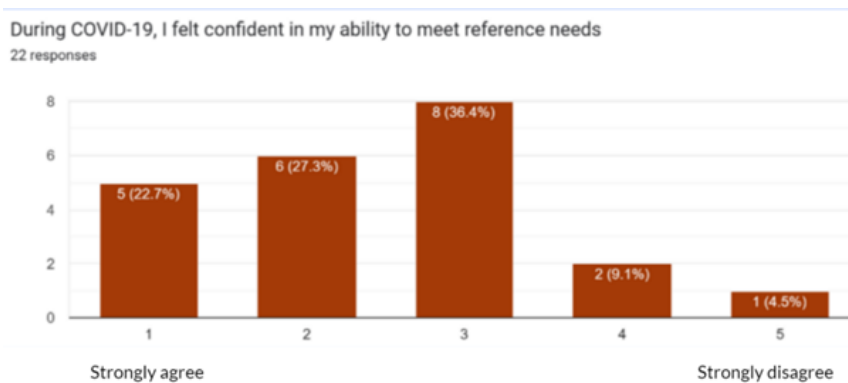
Figure 2.

Theme 2: COVID-19 and student reference needs

How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect student needs? *"We'd all love more reference questions, I think."*

- **Before**: Prior to the pandemic, in-person reference interactions dominated. Though the total number of in-person interactions varied across institutions and students were at times reluctant to engage with librarians, multiple librarians we interviewed recalled libraries teeming with patrons, who posed questions ranging from assistance with academic reference to campus resources. Higher overall student enrollment contributed to more total reference interactions, while in-person classes coincided with more in-person assistance.
  - **During**: From 2020-2021 through 2022, the total number of students and reference interactions—both online and in-person—were lower than pre-pandemic levels. In the questionnaire, most respondents indicated that there was not an uptick in reference needs during the pandemic, as pictured at right (in which 1= strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree) . Librarians we interviewed largely agree that COVID-19 had an impact on their ability to meet student reference needs. Barriers relating to technology access, such as needing to check out laptops, along with a lack of digital literacy were two prominent issues, while life challenges outside of school and personality shifts in the student population impeded librarians' ability to meet student reference needs. Despite the changes and adversities, most librarians felt they received similar reference questions—research, citation help, campus resources—compared to before the pandemic and continued to provide support in answering questions. Collaboration with faculty members to reach students and incorporate research and reference into the classroom became even more important for students to understand how to interact and benefit from the library.
- **From 2022 onwards**: At the time we conducted interviews, participants shared

that dedicated chat platforms, which rose to become the primary method of communication during the height of the pandemic, are still popular today. Other reference resources born out of the pandemic, such as online reference appointments, continue to thrive. On the other hand, the number of in-person reference interactions are significantly lower than pre-pandemic times as reported by almost all colleges we spoke to.

Trends and challenges in meeting student reference needs. *"How can we expect students to focus on, like, statistics when they don't have enough food ... when, you know, they don't have a house to live in?"*

- **Volume**: Per our interviews and questionnaire results, librarians did not see an uptick in reference questions and interactions, even as more questions emerged regarding community and technology support than those that comprise traditional reference work.
- **Nature**: Librarians we interviewed stated that reference appointments centered partially on reference questions and partially on making human connections during the pandemic. Multiple interviewees and survey respondents mentioned widespread insecurities impacting students' ability to access resources and succeed academically during the height of the pandemic; these primarily included accessing basic necessities such as food, housing, employment, and transportation. However, resources such as technology items—notably laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots—were likewise reported. For example, while students across Washington State requested technology items well before COVID-19, the pandemic increased the need substantially; many—if not all—colleges were unprepared for the level of demand

for such items, further marginalizing struggling students.

Perceptions about working with students. *"I think we're going to feel those long term effects for quite a while still."*

Interviews were the primary tool to uncover the following findings:
- **Digital skills**: Various levels of digital literacy also presented a barrier to student success. This is particularly important, as some interviewees reported digital interactions as their only lifeline to students.
- **Fears about insufficient resources**: Librarians and library workers reported budget concerns affecting the types of services and the level of service provided to students, faculty, and staff. This was furthered by an expectation of online services, and changing expectations around availability of librarians for in-person and virtual help.
- **"Students have changed"**: Moreover, library staff report that COVID-19 appears to have engendered personality shifts in the student population (e.g., more timidity), which continue to make meeting reference needs more difficult. Librarians attribute this change to school closures during the pandemic, which resulted in students widely failing to develop social-emotional learning skills they otherwise would have.
- **Feeling needed**: Some librarians expressed they felt needed more than ever, while others felt the opposite—this sentiment varied by institution.

Theme 3: How libraries responded to student needs

Virtual Reference Services (VRS). *"The way we try to meet [student] needs now has fundamentally changed."*

- **Prior limited use of VRS**: Before COVID-19, there were varying levels of

VRS offered. Starting in 2008, many libraries, including those who took part in our research, began participating in AskWA—a statewide cooperative 24/7 reference chat shared by traditional, community, and technical colleges—rather than hosting their own virtual chat service. Further, some libraries offered both virtual and in-person reference meetings for students, as indicated in the questionnaire chart below (1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree).

My library had virtual reference services before COVID-19, beginning in March 2020
22 responses
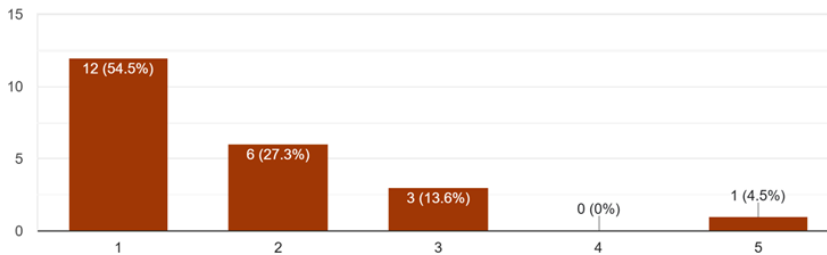
Figure 3.

- **Rise of VRS**: All 34 library websites reviewed in November 2022 included some form of virtual reference, whether it be a chat service, virtual meetings, texting, or email requests. This breadth of offerings spoke to the dominance of VRS. Several interviewees mentioned that when opportunities for in-person reference services closed down, they began to take on more responsibility for managing the chat queue for their own student populations instead of relying on other co-op librarians.

Shifts in value. *"We, the brick and mortar, like, we have to be here."*

- The physical library: Many interview participants reflected on the importance of the physical library as a place to form and foster relationships with students. Several

librarians also mentioned that physical course reserves were a highly valued resource pre-pandemic. In-person interactions are desired by librarians, but online enrollment, when offered, continued in 2022 and even now into 2025 continues to be a popular modality among students.

- Resources and services: Interviews revealed that circulation services stopped or slowed, and libraries changed the focus of their faculty and staff. It was common for libraries to be responsible for lending programs for laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots. Libraries with existing programs often had to secure additional funding. Most librarians interviewed participated in developing virtual resources to be shared with students or for faculty to embed in LMS/Canvas learning courses.

Expansion of student needs. *"We're gonna have to do everything to reach all of our students."*

Interviews and write-in comments to the questionnaire informed the following findings.

- **Academic**: Most librarians already had a broad definition of reference needs before the pandemic, which was based on the particular needs of their students. They were prepared to work with diverse students with varying levels of experience with libraries and leveraged the "reference transaction" as a gateway to provide additional academic services to students. Many interview participants had clear ideas about what programs, professors, and types of students would be most likely to leverage the library (e.g., nursing).
- **Social/emotional**: Many interview participants reflected on the importance of supporting students who may be struggling with non-academic challenges. For example, during an online research appointment, one librarian would begin with an intentional personal check-in before diving into reference needs. For

some appointments, this check-in took up most of the appointment.

- **Technological**: To effectively facilitate virtual services, librarians and library workers needed to be capable of providing instruction and troubleshooting issues around different types of technology, as students had varying levels of digital literacy. Students' increased need for technology during the pandemic emphasized the pressing need for digital equity.

Areas of minimal impact.

- **Certain constants**: It's worth noting that a minority of librarians identified a few areas that were impacted minimally, if at all, by COVID-19. For instance, some librarians observed an ongoing challenge of outreach with technical college students who did not have a research focus (e.g., automotive or cosmetology students), while others reflected that they received strikingly similar types of questions virtually compared to those they had received in person.

Discussion

Reference needs are student needs at community and technical colleges. *"A lot of what they do at that desk might not necessarily be considered reference, but to us it is."*

Within the context of our findings, we conclude that community and technical college librarians consider a broad range of student needs to be included in the scope of reference, and that those needs diversified further during the pandemic. Community college librarians have long considered a wide array of reference needs that went beyond traditional definitions (Palmer, 2019). As one librarian we interviewed said, "I think community college reference services like ours run this huge, wide gamut. Whatever the students' needs are, I would say, reference services are." This approach was reaffirmed during the pandemic: reference services

expanded during COVID-19 as students' social/emotional and basic needs had to be prioritized ahead of research and academic questions. Perhaps this perspective is shared by other types of academic librarians, but considering the diversity of students attending a community or technical college, including non-traditional or vocational students, we believe the depth and flexibility of reference services in this context warrants particular attention.

COVID-19 revealed a proliferating digital divide. *"The one thing that the pandemic did is it unearthed the inequity of everything."*

Similar to other studies on this topic, we discovered that students' poor access to reliable Internet and devices—basic needs for students to be successful in remote learning—limited librarians' ability to meet reference needs during the pandemic (Blankstein & Wolff-Eisenberg, 2021). In a community college context, the stakes were especially high: students who could not adapt to digital learning simply did not continue their education, and students in programs that do not have a digital component (autowork, cosmetology, etc.) were not offered the choice to continue. Undoubtedly, the pandemic caused a disruption to social mobility for these students. Though many libraries we spoke with already employed online reference tools such as chat (via the AskWA consortium) and LibGuides, immediate adoption of these tools was lower than expected for most libraries, reflecting a gap in access for students. Most libraries we spoke with played an integral role in securing grant funding and providing technology resources to students, including Wi-Fi hotspots and devices.

In the wake of the pandemic, we should consider the impact not only to those who experienced the direct ramifications of the digital divide, but also those who worked so tirelessly to close it. Librarians who continued to work in-person faced personal health risks in order to deliver physical technology assets to students. Those who worked remotely were charged with ensuring security and safety of student

connections within the space of their own homes. What would community and technical colleges have done without these sacrifices? In considering how the pandemic impacted student reference needs, and how to proceed now that more light has been shed on the digital divide, we should center the professionals who provide access and digital skills. Their contributions have a resounding impact.

Disruption of reference as place *"I think [COVID-19] meaningfully diversified the way we provide research assistance. It forced deep thinking. We have much more information from students on the mix of needs—we have much more data."*

Relevant literature to this topic emphasizes reference as an activity tied to the physical space of the library (Kilzer, 2011). Librarians reflected on how the reference desk could serve as a gateway to the rest of the library and allow for strong connections with students. Several librarians mentioned the significance of in-person interactions; one librarian noted how the modality enabled them to be more conversational and "generate a more research-oriented transaction" from an initial transaction, such as one focused on basic technology. Another librarian noted how online reference "doesn't feel as personal" compared to in-person reference. Despite the prevailing preference for reference taking place within the physical library, libraries nonetheless poured resources into creating digital spaces for students, such as website resources, LibGuides, and Canvas modules. One librarian replaced the focus on reference as place with reference as relationship, remarking that "COVID has really highlighted how important it is [to] hav[e] a librarian mak[e] a connection with students in a classroom," whether that be an in person or online classroom, with the assistance of faculty in facilitating those connections. Indeed, faculty were identified as a key component to meeting student needs. As another librarian remarked: "If we can establish long-term sustainable relationships with faculty in a way that connects to the library, then I think we'll continue to have robust reference service needs." This refined

focus was echoed in another librarian's take that, regardless of the changes the pandemic engendered, librarians will "always be here as those connectors" between students and resources. While COVID-19 highlighted the merits of in-person reference interactions, it simultaneously clarified the importance of librarian-student relationships, which need not be exclusively cultivated in person.

Missing voices. *"We have to be more proactive about what we do, how you can contact us."*

During the research process, the concept of missing voices was brought up over and over, especially in the interviews. Librarians and library workers commented on the challenge of outreach to students, and sometimes professors, during the pandemic. These missing voices can make it difficult to determine the needs of students and affect the services provided by the library. Additionally, librarians wanted to know what other libraries were doing during the pandemic. Professional organizations filled this need to some extent but since community and technical college faculty are generally not compensated for publication, there is limited public information about such colleges' COVID-19 responses. One librarian noted how difficult it was to assess her college's, and in particular her library's, response to the pandemic, as she had no point of reference; she had little to contribute regarding how they compared: "It's hard for me to project how things are at the other community colleges, because I don't have enough discussions with them."

Limitations of research and recommendations for further study

Because our research focused on librarians and library workers, we did not collect data on student or instructor perceptions of the effect of COVID-19 on student reference needs. Further research in this area should seek the perceptions of these groups, as well as college administrators, and collect data on the holistic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on community and technical college students. Additionally,

there was an incongruity between some responses to the questionnaire and interviews. For example, more respondents said "Disagree" to COVID-19 impacting student reference needs in the questionnaire. This may have been due to the format, or perhaps more comparison of librarian vs library workers perspectives is warranted. Further research on this topic should examine the change over time of the growth, maintenance, and/or decline of virtual library resources and physical library resources in a post-pandemic era, student needs and library resources in different regions (urban versus rural), and an analysis of VRS before, during, and post-pandemic via an examination of chat transcriptions.

Conclusion

The primary focus of this research was to understand academic librarians' and library workers' perspectives on how COVID-19 impacted community and technical college student reference needs. There is a recognized gap in this research area, as most research tends to focus on four-year institutions where formal research is most often conducted by and required of faculty. Not only is our article important for an under-researched educational demographic to use in their present-day decision making, but autumn 2022 was a unique time to research the effects of COVID-19 on a "pre-" and "post-" pandemic society. The main findings we uncovered through interviews, our questionnaire, and our website analysis shed much-needed light on the many ways that community and technical colleges librarians and library workers perceived the impact of COVID-19 on student reference needs.

Overall, our findings indicate that COVID-19 had a broad impact on student reference needs, and librarian and library worker perspectives underscore the myriad of direct and indirect effects. The central themes of our research findings pertain to library perceptions, the impact of COVID-19 on student reference needs, and library responses to student needs during the pandemic. COVID-19 expedited the move to

online library services, and librarians perceived a major shift in student and institutional expectations surrounding this move. The decrease in physical interactions created challenges for librarians and motivated them to meet student needs holistically. COVID-19 had a marked impact on in-person and virtual interactions, with librarians reporting that reference interactions in both modalities had yet to reach pre-pandemic levels. There was a marked shift as well towards virtual services over in-person services that remained popular in autumn 2022, even though many libraries reopened to students. Student reference needs were especially impacted by access barriers relating to technology and digital literacy and other challenges stemming from the pandemic like budget cuts, the increasing digital divide, and changing expectations around librarian and library worker roles. Libraries shifted in major ways to meet student needs during this time, including a strong pivot towards VRS, expanded offerings for hardware lending, online resources, and OER, and a more concentrated awareness for the social and emotional needs of students.

For community and technical colleges, the pandemic emphasized student needs as reference needs, and highlighted how community and technical librarians and library workers have always gone beyond traditional definitions of reference even before COVID-19 to meet students where they are at. The pandemic aggravated existing issues around technology access, equity, and digital literacy. COVID-19 disrupted the reference desk as a physical place and gateway within the library, and librarians worked to create a digital place for reference. We recommend further assessments of this nature in other state and local communities while retrospective knowledge is still fresh, and to ensure that the roles and perspectives of community and technical college librarians and library workers are remembered and adequately represented.

Acknowledgements

References

Blankstein, M., & Wolff-Eisenberg, C. (2021). Library strategy and collaboration across the college ecosystem: Results from a national survey of community college library directors. *Ithaka S+R*. https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.315922

Bouchard, J. (2021). KBOCC adapts library resources for pandemic challenges. *Tribal College Journal*, *33*(2), 12–13. https://tribalcollegejournal.org/kbocc-adapts-library-resources-for-pandemic-challenges/

Bray, J. (2021). *Digital Divide: How Technology Access Impacts Community Colleges Across the United States During a Pandemic.* Association of Community College Trustees. https://acct.org/sites/default/files/documents/2023-05/ACCT_Digital_Divide_at_Community_Colleges_During_COVID_2021.pdf

Cohn, S., & Hyams, R. (2021). Making room for TBD: adapting library websites during a pandemic. *Computers in Libraries, 41*(2), 18–21. https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1915&context=cc_pubs

Connell, R. S., Wallis, L., & Comeaux, D. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on the use of academic library resources. *Information Technology and Libraries, 40*(2), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.6017/ital.v40i2.12629

Fancher, S. E., & Mabee, S. H. (2022). Fish, not fishing lessons: A pragmatic reprioritization of reference services. *Portal: Libraries and the Academy, 22*(1), 221–226. https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2022.0001

Green River College. (2022, April 1). *Green River College Phased Reopening for Spring 2022.* https://www.greenriver.edu/campus/media/documents/covid/Green-River-College-Reopening-Plan-revised-4.1.2022.pdf

Gutman, D. (2022, January 25). University of Washington, Seattle University to return to in-person classes. *The Seattle Times.* https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/education/university-of-washington-to-return-to-in-person-classes/

Johns Hopkins Medicine (2022, July 29). What is Coronavirus? https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus

Kilzer, R. (2011). Reference as service, reference as place: A view of reference in the academic library. *The Reference Librarian, 52*(4), 291–299. https://doi.org/10.1080/02763877.2011.588539

Kramer, E. H. (2020). A close look: Roving reference in a community college library information commons. *Reference Services Review, 48*(2), 271–285. https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-08-2019-0051

Krieb, D. (2018). Assessing the impact of reference assistance and library instruction on retention and grades using student tracking technology. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice, 13*(2), 2–12. https://doi.org/10.18438/eblip29402

Lacy, M., & Hamlett, A. (2021). Librarians, step out of the classroom!: How improved faculty-led IL instruction improves student learning. *Reference Services Review, 49*(2), 163–175. https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-09-2020-0062

MyNorthwest. (2021, December 30). *Many Washington colleges, universities will start winter term remotely.* https://mynorthwest.com/local/washington-colleges-universities-winter-term-remote/3295304

National Digital Inclusion Alliance. (n.d.). *NDIA Definitions.* https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions/

Nelson, E. (2017). Information literacy needs of community college students in transition: A literature review. *Reference Services Review, 45*(2), 278–285. https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-11-2016-0078

Palmer, K. (2019). How libraries can meet the extracurricular needs of community-college students. *Chronicle of Higher Education, 66*(10). https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-libraries-can-meet-the-extracurricular-needs-of-community-college-students/

Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), American Library Association (ALA). (n.d.) *Definitions of Reference*. https://www.ala.org/rusa/guidelines/definitionsreference

Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (2022, August 3). *Ready to learn more about Washington's 34 community and technical colleges?* https://www.sbctc.edu/our-colleges/explore-colleges/

Washington State Department of Commerce. (2023, August). *Internet For All in Washington Five-Year Action Plan - Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program*. https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/yr03ll1kw1rpd7x4w4wk0z5g6gdah90n

Yoon-Hendricks, A. (2023, June 28). *Washington Nets $1.2B in Federal Funds for Broadband.* https://www.govtech.com/network/washington-nets-1-2b-in-federal-funds-for-broadband

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide
1. How would you define students' reference needs?
2. What were the significant milestones for [enter name of community college here] during the pandemic?
3. Do you think COVID-19 has impacted students' reference needs? If so, how, and why do you think that is?
4. What reference needs did you see an uptick in since the beginning of COVID-19?
5. Do you think COVID-19 has reshaped how librarians meet students' reference needs? If so, how, and why do you think that is?
6. What reference services, as deployed by librarians, did you see an uptick in since the beginning of COVID-19?
7. Do you believe the way librarians now attempt to meet students' needs fundamentally and/or permanently changed because of COVID-19? Why is that?
8. How do you see the future of reference services evolving?
9. Are there any services and resources that you recommend for further evaluation?

Appendix B: Questionnaire

Questionnaire: Librarian Perception of Impact of COVID-19 on Community College Student Reference Needs					
Note: In the below questionnaire, "students" refers to community college students. "Librarians" refers to academic librarians at community colleges. "The COVID-19 pandemic" refers to the Coronavirus pandemic, beginning in March 2020 and continuing today					
#	Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	There is a clear definition of "student reference needs" among the staff in my academic library					
2	I have observed that COVID-19 impacted my ability to meet student reference needs					
3	I have observed that COVID-19 impacted community college student reference needs					
4	My library had virtual reference services before the COVID-19 pandemic, beginning in March 2020					
5	My library currently offers virtual reference services					
6	The student population I support understands what the concept of reference services are, in general					
7	During the COVID-19 pandemic, my library communicated the reference services available to students					
8	During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an uptick in student reference needs					
9	During the COVID-19 pandemic, the library had adequate infrastructure (e.g., hardware, software, facilities) to support student reference needs without additional investment					
10	I felt that the library staff had adequate training to meet student reference needs during the COVID-19 pandemic					
11	Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, I felt confident in my ability to meet student reference needs					
12	During the COVID-19 pandemic, I felt confident in my ability to meet student reference needs					
	Would you be willing to participate in a 20-minute interview?	Yes/No, if Yes - contact info				
	Do you have any additional comments?	Free Text				

Book Bans: An Exploration of the Intersection Between Prisons, School Libraries, and Public Libraries in Texas

Sydney Joseph, MLIS Student, University of Washington
Molly O'Donnell, MLIS Student, University of Washington
Samantha Mitchell, MLIS Student, University of Washington
Maura Wilson, MLIS Student, University of Washington

Abstract

In recent years, the increase in censorship attempts via book challenges and bans has been a large part of public discourse. This has only escalated recently with the shuttering of the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the changing political landscape. The research in this paper is focused on a single state, Texas, but is representative of censorship efforts being documented across the country. Texas was selected due to having one of the highest rates of incarceration in the nation and one of the highest rates of book bans. For a variety of unique reasons, materials are heavily restricted for people who are incarcerated, many of which share the same genres and themes found unsuitable for public schools and libraries. Across all three institutions--prisons, libraries, and schools--banned materials adversely affect people from marginalized communities, especially Black, brown, and LGBTQ+ people. This paper seeks to compare and contrast the book bans inside prisons with the material challenges facing public schools and public libraries within the state of Texas, utilizing research methods of interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. It also explores how book bans in these three institutions affect populations with multiple marginalized identities and what information professionals can do to intervene on behalf of these populations.

Keywords: censorship, book ban, book challenge, book reconsideration, incarceration, public libraries, public schools, Texas

Article Type: Research paper

Introduction

A popular colloquial phrase suggests everything is bigger in Texas. The phrase lightheartedly alludes to the state's expansive geography but holds a more concerning truth. According to the Prison Policy Initiative (2024), "Texas has an incarceration rate of 751 per 100,000 people…meaning that it locks up a higher percentage of its people than any independent democratic country on earth." Blakinger et al. (2022) with The Marshall Project compiled an ever-evolving list of 9,396 titles that have been banned in Texas prisons. Further, in the 2023-24 school year, Meehan et al. (2024) with Pen America documented 538 book bans in Texas schools, which were among the highest in the country. Finally, in 2023, the American Library Association (ALA) revealed that individuals and groups made 49 attempts to challenge or ban 1,470 titles in Texas public schools and libraries–again, among the highest in the country.

Book banning trends, otherwise considered censorship attempts, are not unique to Texas prisons, schools, or libraries. While research shows book bans are happening around the country, these censorship attempts are particularly relevant for institutions in Texas. In most cases, prisons, schools, and libraries are publicly-funded institutions along the heart of the "Bible Belt," the southernmost region of the United States characterized by its conservative, Protestant-Christian roots. With blurred lines between politics and religion, many stakeholders–political and religious groups, parents, boards, administrations–are the same challengers and decision makers across all three institutions, especially between schools and public libraries (American Library Association, 2023a, p. 8).

Through a combination of literature review, questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis, the research presented in this paper seeks to examine and summarize trends in book banning and censorship attempts across prisons, schools, and libraries in Texas. Our research will summarize and recommend how information professionals, particularly librarians, can provide support to people who are incarcerated through programming and advocating against book bans for people behind bars. We will discuss the implications of book bans across Texas institutions and how these censorship attempts impact individual liberties, particularly for historically marginalized individuals and communities. Ultimately, our research will shed light on how book bans and censorship attempts uphold cultural hegemony and existing power structures at the expense of people from marginalized communities.

Literature Review

Our research begins with an overview of existing literature as we begin to unpack the landscape and impact of reading and book bans in schools, libraries, and carceral facilities in Texas and beyond. Perhaps the most often heard about aspect of censorship in Texas today is the case of book bans within public schools. The

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Texas has tracked the number of book challenges and bans since 1996, though reports are only publicly available from 2002-2019 (American Civil Liberties Union of Texas, 2022). During this time frame, book bans were on the decline, with 16 books banned during the 2005-2006 school year and only 6 banned in the 2018-2019 school year (American Civil Liberties Union of Texas, 2006; American Civil Liberties Union of Texas, 2019). These numbers pale in comparison to the recent findings of PEN America. In a recent study of the landscape of censorship via book bans, experts found 801 books banned across 22 Texas school districts in the 2021-2022 school year and 635 banned books across 12 districts in the 2022-2023 school year (Meehan, et al, 2023). With this drastic change between 2019 and 2023, one might wonder what is driving this increased wave of censorship.

This escalation in school book bans is not occurring in a vacuum; it is being actively reinforced through new legislation. One of the most impactful recent laws is HB 900, The READER Act (Restricting Adult and Explicit Designated Education Resources), which went into effect September 1, 2023. This presents yet another obstacle for Texas public schools, as the law requires all vendors who sell materials, or who have previously sold materials with sexual content of any kind to school districts, to assign ratings to the materials that have been purchased. The two ratings a book can receive are (1) sexually explicit or (2) sexually relevant (Texas Library Association, 2023). In order for a book to be rated sexually relevant, the content must align with required curriculum set forth by the district, and the book can be accessed only with guardian approval. Anything deemed sexually explicit is recalled or put on a no purchase list. If the vendor fails to rate a book, or incorrectly rates a book after a 60-day period, the book is added to the no purchase list. Though HB 900 is currently in effect, several organizations have banded together to file a lawsuit against HB 900 stating that it is in violation of both the 1st and 14th Amendments (Texas Library Association, 2023a). On

November 29, 2023, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals heard oral arguments on whether "the state can continue to implement the requirements of HB 900" while the underlying lawsuit on the constitutionality of the law goes through the court system (Texas Library Association, 2023b). As the Fifth Circuit has not yet ruled on the issue, the outcome of the oral arguments remains to be seen. Even so, HB 900 has served as the backbone for another bill aimed at keeping "sexually explicit" content off the shelves of Texas public schools. On March 19, 2025, the Texas Senate passed Senate Bill 13, which "would require that school boards, rather than librarians, have the final say over which new books or materials can be put in school libraries" (Acharya, 2025). SB 13, supported by all 20 Republican senators from Texas, aims to create local school library advisory councils, strengthen parental rights over public school library catalogs over materials that could potentially be accessed by their school-age children, and would even entitle parents access to all written records concerning their child, including but not limited to, "records relating to school library materials the child obtains from a school library" (Texas Legislature, 2025).

Since 2011, PEN America, the Texas Civil Rights Project, and a social justice project called "Banned Books Behind Bars," alongside others, have researched and reported the common, harmful, and often arbitrary practice of literary censorship implemented by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice on its correctional facilities and its impact on the people who are incarcerated there. According to an article penned by Katie Owens-Murphy from the University of North Alabama in 2023, "the U.S. Department of Justice grants wardens complete jurisdiction over whether a publication is detrimental to the security, discipline, or good order of the institution or if it might facilitate criminal activity" (Owens-Murphy, 2023, p. 11). Prison faculty may restrict reading materials based on any reasoning they see fit, despite the fact their decision-making could infringe on the rights of intellectual freedom, accessibility, and

education of the vulnerable population in their care. Censorship on reading materials in correctional facilities can be implemented from an individual, institutional, and/or statewide ban; Texas currently has a list of over 10,000 books that are prohibited based on their content or for capricious reasons (Birch, 2022).

One study highlights the impact of libraries and reading in prisons, which gives people who are incarcerated a means for productively using and passing time; researchers found "...that prison libraries and reading in prison provided a means of a cognitive escape from a harsh reality, a capacity to find a community of like-minded people within prison and to maintain a pathway back to life and loved-ones 'outside the fence'" (Garner, 2020, p. 1047). Another study by Kaimei Han (2023) adds that the role of prison libraries are essential in "providing access to educational opportunities, promoting mental health, building family connections, and developing personal skills to adapt to society" (pp. 108-110). Research shows a myriad of benefits to access to books in prisons; when books are banned or removed from carceral facilities, the consequences to personal development and wellbeing can be devastating.

Researchers, libraries, and nonprofit professionals emphasize the importance of information professionals advocating against book bans. Where it concerns direct programming opportunities for people who are incarcerated, Jeanie Austin (2022) summarizes initiatives including, but not limited to, "book cart services, literacy and job-searching programs, programs related to employment, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy, and outreach to sites where people recently released from prison are required to live or to attend programs or meetings" (p. 103).

The New York Public Library (NYPL) has created a system for providing reference support to people who are incarcerated through postal mail through their Correctional Services Program. In addition to other services, such as literacy services for system-impacted teens, NYPL's

reference services extend far beyond New York prisons and into the rest of the country (Drabinski and Rabina, 2015). Additionally, the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) provides a strong blueprint for information professionals to consider as they seek to provide services for people who are incarcerated. Programming includes weekly book service visits to San Francisco County Jails, access to e-media (including books and music), reference support through mail, and reentry support (SFPL, 2024).

Andy Chan, who has been with Books to Prisoners since 1994 (a nonprofit who mails books to people who are incarcerated), emphasizes the merit behind information professionals engaging with people who are incarcerated and partnering with organizations doing similar work:

> We send [books] in response to individuals writing to us, and part of that is creating or maintaining a connection to the outside, to people who care, who recognize some degree of humanity in people who are–basically once they're in a system–treated as machines, as problems to be managed… What we're doing is humanizing the person, and that relationship of showing that we care too… we know [this] has an impact, because people tell us that it's had an impact… where previously they felt rejected, and you know, more unmoored from the rest of society (personal communication, October 31, 2023).

In 2024, as part of the *Expanding Information Access for Incarcerated People Initiative* through the San Francisco Public Library, the ALA issued its first revision of the *Standards for Library Services for the Incarcerated or Detained* since 1992. With updates that intentionally consider the information needs of vulnerable populations facing incarceration, including LGBTQ+ individuals, people who are undocumented, youth, and even the particular needs of those who are facing reincarceration, "the new standards will heed the current phenomenon of

mass incarceration, the inequitable incarceration rates of BIPOC individuals, and the rising rates of incarceration of women (especially women of color)" (American Library Association, 2024). The standards have the potential to completely overhaul how information professionals can better support people who are incarcerated, especially those experiencing book bans. While its future remains uncertain, another proposed avenue for addressing access issues is the Prison Libraries Act. Proposed by U.S. Representatives Emanuel Cleaver, II (D-MO), Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX), and Shontel Brown (D-OH) in April 2023, this bill would significantly improve the issue of literary accessibility in carceral facilities across the continental United States. The Prison Libraries Act was proposed with the hopes that it would "...expand library resources in U.S. state and territory correctional facilities to advance reintegration efforts, reduce recidivism, and increase educational opportunities for incarcerated citizens" (Cleaver House, 2023). With a proposed $60,000,000 to be distributed over six years, state and U.S. territory governments could apply for a grant to build capacity and improve library services, "including education and job training, digital literacy, career readiness programming, and computer and internet access," and more (U.S. Congress, 2023). However, despite its potential, the Prison Libraries Act has not yet come to fruition and remains under consideration in the House Committee on the Judiciary. Despite the bill's potential to transform access to information in carceral settings, it has seen no movement since its introduction in 2023. The recent death of co-sponsor Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, who was an influential voice for justice and equity, raises new questions about whether the bill will gain the support needed to advance.

As the literature and legislative landscape show, censorship in Texas operates through a combination of legal policy, institutional discretion, and cultural pressure—each of which disproportionately affects marginalized populations. Our research builds on this foundation to explore how these dynamics play out across schools, libraries, and prisons, and

what information professionals can do in response.

Research Methods

For this paper, researchers utilized three different methods to collect data: a questionnaire, interviews, and document analysis.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire sought to better understand the level of familiarity information professionals have with material challenges and bans in public libraries, public schools, and prisons–both in general and specifically within the state of Texas. The questionnaire also collected information on interventions currently being implemented by information professionals and ideas for combating material challenges. We chose to survey librarians, LIS professionals, and MLIS students (n=27) who were geographically dispersed to understand two things: one being how aware people outside of Texas were of the widespread impact of material challenges within the state, and the second, to understand the experiences of material challenges in their location as the impacts of censorship are not exclusive to one state. The questionnaire had ten required questions, some of which had an optional follow-up question. The questions were a combination of multiple choice, linear scale, and open:

1. Title and Profession
2. Type of institution or organization in which you work:
   a. Public library
   b. Academic library
   c. School or school library (Public, Private, Charter, etc)
   d. Prison library
   e. Student
   f. Other
3. From 1-5, how familiar are you with the socio-political landscape of book banning in public libraries around the United States?

4. From 1-5, How familiar are you with the socio-political landscape of book banning in schools and school libraries around the United States?
5. From 1-5, How familiar are you with the socio-political landscape of book banning in prisons around the United States?
6. Has your library, school, institution, or organization experienced book banning or book challenges?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Do not know
7. Please rate your level of agreement, neutrality, or disagreement with the following statement: Book bans and challenges disproportionately impact people from marginalized communities.
8. Please rate your level of agreement, neutrality, or disagreement with the following statement: Information professionals should act on behalf of people who are incarcerated who face book bans and challenges behind bars.
9. Does your library, school, institution, or organization have an existing program (or a program in progress) in support of people who are incarcerated?
10. From your perspective, what actions can information professionals take on behalf of people who are both incarcerated and facing book bans, challenges, and censorship attempts? If none, please write: "None."

As the questionnaire was performed while still developing the scope of research, a majority of the questions and responses were not relevant to the discussion herein. The exception to this was the optional "Explain your response" follow-up to question 6 which is cited in the discussion section below.

Interviews

Researchers conducted five interviews, talking with two people involved with Books to Prisoners (a nonprofit organization that mails books to people who are incarcerated), one public

librarian in Texas, one former prison librarian and current public librarian, and one former public school administrator in Texas. These individuals were selected due to their personal knowledge and expertise with schools, libraries, and prisons. Researchers paid particular attention to interviewing people with experience in the state of Texas as much as possible. This provided insight into the Texas landscape, as this is the primary focus of the paper. Each interviewer tailored their questions in order to personalize the interview process and collect the most relevant information. Approximately nine questions were asked during the interview process:

1. What is your experience with challenged materials/book bans?
    a. Can you speak to the landscape of book bans in Texas prisons, schools, or libraries?
2. How are book bans, book challenges, and/or censorship attempts addressed?
3. Did you observe any repercussions after materials were challenged or banned?
4. What populations do you observe as being most affected by book bans?
    a. How did the affected populations react to materials being challenged or banned?
5. Did you observe specific themes/authors/titles being challenged?
6. Do you think that the number of challenged materials is increasing?
    a. Why or why not?
7. How do these book bans impact people with intersecting marginalized identities?
8. Should information professionals be intervening on book bans/challenges?
    a. If not, why?
    b. If yes, why? How?

If Question #8 is answered "yes," then to be followed up with…

9. From your perspective, what actions can information professionals take on behalf of people who are impacted by book bans?

By utilizing interviews as a primary research method our team was able to gain secondhand accounts of the effect book banning and censorship have on groups of marginalized individuals within public libraries, schools, and carceral facilities.

Document Analysis

The third research method used was document analysis. Researchers analyzed over 60 documents, including case studies, policies, censorship reports, and more. This allowed for the collection of data on the specific books challenged across prisons, public schools and public libraries, the reasons given for the actions, general themes disallowed in certain institutions, the number of districts implementing bans, and many more crucial details. Document analysis was a continuous and iterative process in the research process, as the nature of book bans is an ever-evolving and continually worsening issue in our nation.

Findings

Questionnaire. When asked if they had ideas for how and if information professionals can intervene on behalf of people who are incarcerated, our research team's questionnaire respondents had a variety of suggestions: "build community partnerships," "increase awareness of the realities of prison libraries," "create and maintain authentic relationships with prisons and people who are incarcerated rather than adopting an adversarial role," "support legislation fighting against censorship," "donate weeded materials to prison libraries," and "raise awareness through social media."

Interviews. As evidenced by extreme and arbitrary book bans and censorship attempts, carceral systems are perhaps the most explicit example of power imbalances and how books are utilized as a tool of oppression. In an interview, Michelle Dillon (personal communication, October 30, 2023), a long-time volunteer and board member with Books to Prisoners, says:

Prison is already a place that is obviously about control… it's isolating by design, so when you take away that other form of access [books]...you are damaging their sense of self, and especially when we're talking about books that are of culturally grounded interest, you're severing that connection to information about their heritage, about their pasts, about their futures.

Public Librarian in Bulverde, Texas, Montana Rindahl (personal communication, November 2023) says it is not uncommon to have unhappy patrons.

They just yell at you… I had a person chew me out this summer and essentially call me a pedophile. And I was like, "thank you so much for your feedback. We're here for you." I had a different dad tell me that I didn't know shit, he's seen that shit before and if I think that this is appropriate for children maybe I shouldn't work here, and he wants to talk to my manager… I was like, "well she's not here and when she's gone, I'm the manager. So how can I continue to help you?"

Former Texas educator and administrator Laura Burns has noticed differences in Texas curriculum and textbooks compared to those her students use in Missouri where she currently teaches. "So the textbooks, the items, the words, the way things are laid out in the textbooks for the kids is completely different than other parts of the country… Things are taken out" (L. Burns, personal communication, November 2, 2023).

Each testimony affirmed our original findings, censorship has an adverse effect on individuals, especially those in marginalized communities.

Document Analysis. To deepen our understanding of the current landscape of censorship in Texas, we conducted an extensive document analysis focusing on public schools, public libraries, and carceral institutions. This method allowed us to examine primary sources—including policy documents, banned book lists, legal filings, public meeting transcripts, and more—in order to trace how censorship is being enacted, justified, and resisted across different contexts. Our analysis reveals that book bans are rarely isolated incidents. Rather, they are part of a broader system of control—often politically motivated, inconsistently applied, and disproportionately harmful to historically marginalized communities. What follows is a closer look at how these patterns play out across each institutional setting.

According to data compiled by PEN America over 500 books were banned from public schools in Texas over the last academic year (Meehan, et al., 2023). In response to these bans, teachers report feeling pressured to alter their curriculum, often at the expense of student learning and intellectual exploration. Many express fear not only for their students, but for their own job security. "Ten current or recently retired Texas school librarians who spoke to a reporter described growing fears that could be attacked by parents on social media or threatened with criminal charges" (Hixenbaugh, 2022). The challenges and subsequent policy changes are also confusing. Texas educator Kathleen Harrison was quoted by the New York Times asking, "OK, you ban a book — does that ban the topic? At what point do I practice subversion?" (Powell, 2021).

According to information professionals Emily Drabinski and Debbie Rabina (2015), "incarcerated people face significant information poverty, both because of limited access to information resources and because incarceration itself produces information needs that cannot be easily met" (p. 42-48). In the past few years alone, the COVID-19 pandemic increased prison censorship as more books were removed from prison shelves for safety and hygiene reasons, which were then never replaced. In Texas prisons, reports show "1,092 books banned statewide in 2020 and 1,603 banned in 2021, increasing the number of rejected books by over

50 percent" (Marquis and Luna, 2023). These removals reflect not only a loss of reading materials, but a deeper erosion of intellectual freedom for people behind bars.

Document analysis found that only a small amount of publicly available information exists on the state of book challenges and bans within public libraries in Texas, despite the American Library Association reporting that 54% of challenges in 2023 and 48% of challenges in 2024 occurred in a public library nationwide (American Library Association, 2023a; American Library Association, 2023b). However, evidence of censorship attempts at public libraries does exist. With the exception of a case in Hood County, Texas, which occurred in 2015, the majority of the evidence found on public libraries has occurred in the last three years. In June of 2015, almost one month after a patron found two books in the collection they deemed not appropriate for children, Hood County Library received 52 requests for reconsideration for the two titles, most of which asked for their complete removal (Peters, 2017). The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) wrote a letter to the County Commissioners Court expressing approval of the library's decision to retain the books despite complaints that the books promoted "perversion" and the "gay lifestyle," while also expressing concern over some requests to move those books from the children's area to the adult area of the library (NCAC, 2015). Despite the lack of publicly accessible evidence of book bans in Texas between 2015 and 2023, the events that occurred in Hood County are not unlike what we see today. Further, requests to relocate books from the children's section to the adult section of the library are not exclusive to Hood County.

According to recordings from the Commissioner's Court of Midland County Texas, attempts to censor materials in west Texas remain an ongoing challenge. The issue first arose at a meeting of the Midland County Commissioners Court in February 2023, when Commissioner Dianne Anderson brought up concerns with the content of books donated to the library. Anderson expressed concern over the process in place to determine whether material belongs in the collection and recommended the library utilize a list generated by state representative Matt Krause as a reference for keeping or discarding donations ("Commissioner's Court," 2023a). In August 2023, Commissioner Anderson once again brought forth the issue, suggesting a new library policy which would require books deemed "harmful to children" to be moved out of the children and teen section and into the adult section; Commissioner Anderson referenced H.B. 900 as evidence for why the materials should be moved. The motion to accept this updated library policy passed ("Commissioner's Court," 2023b). While the motion passed, it is unclear who will determine if a book is to be deemed "harmful to children." A few weeks following this motion Anderson and a group of volunteers went through the library collection, pulling 29 titles off the shelves because they did not believe the library director would comply with the new policy (CBS 7 News 2023; "Commissioner's Court," 2023c). The Commissioners meeting on September 11 discussed the library visit on August 30 in detail, yet again, the meeting did not yield a clear consensus on how to enact the policy in the future. The issue was tabled for an entire year until October 15th, 2024, when Commissioner Anderson brought forth another motion regarding the library. This time, the motion was for a policy that will require the library director to put a genre system in place that marks books as "questionable" or "explicit" and then restricting access to patrons over the age of 18. The motion was approved and policy put into place ("Commissioner's Court," 2024). While it remains to be seen how books are deemed "explicit" or "questionable," it is clear that the fight over censorship continues.

In one district in Texas, the discussion on book removal from the public library has advanced all the way to the courts. Challenging book removals in court is significant, as the results of the lawsuit can be used to set a legal precedent either in favor of removals or against. In April

2022, seven members of the Llano County Library filed a complaint against the county and numerous public officials in the United States District Court for the Western District of Texas. According to the complaint filing, the county's effort to remove books from shelves began around summer 2021. The defendants in the suit claimed they removed books due to being "obscene" or "pornographic," but those who filed the complaint are not so sure this is true, citing books containing nudity or depictions of sex that remained on the shelves as evidence of defendants only removing materials they personally found objectionable (BraunHagey & Borden, 2022). Plaintiffs also took umbrage at the decision by the Llano County Library System Director to indefinitely suspend the ebook service Overdrive, which had provided card holders with access to more than 17,000 titles. After this suspension, the Commissioners Court voted to create a new library advisory board and agreed to hold those meetings privately to avoid public commentary (Zalusky, 2023, p. 8-9). Plaintiffs argued these decisions infringe on their first amendment rights (BraunHagey & Borden, 2022). In a filing on March 30th, 2023, the court granted the plaintiffs a preliminary injunction which required all the books be returned to the shelves and the catalog updated to allow them to be checked out while the lawsuit continues. The court order also enjoined the defendants from removing any other book from the collection until the case has been resolved, stating "The Court finds it substantially likely that the removals do not further any substantial governmental interest—much less any compelling one" (Pitman, 2023). The defendants appealed this injunction to the higher court, and on June 6th, 2024 the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit issued a decision on the appeal, affirming the District Court's order with slight modifications to the injunction, which would allow some of the books to be kept off the shelf while litigation continues. The defendants once again appealed and asked the Court for a rehearing, which they were granted (McGill, 2024). On September 10th, 2024 the ACLU and the ACLU of Texas filed an amicus brief asking the Court of Appeals to uphold the District Court's decision

(American Civil Liberties Union, 2024). The case remains stayed in the District Court and it is unclear whether this will be temporary or permanent (Court Listener, 2022).

Trends in material challenges are consistent and interconnected in both public libraries and public schools across Texas. In 2021, Texas state representative Matt Krause created a list of 850 books he wanted removed from any public school in the state (Ellis, 2021). This list was referenced in a discussion involving the Midland County Library system as proof of harmful books to be removed from their library ("Commissioner's Court," 2023a).

Similar to trends in public libraries, book challenges have been on the rise in Texas public schools over the last few years.

The protocol for handling challenged materials varies from one district to another, and challenged books are typically supposed to remain available to students until a thorough review process has completed and a final decision to retain or remove the book has been made. However, school librarians are reporting that administrators are skipping steps in the review process and removing materials with little reflection. The Carroll Independent School District was found to have removed a book without formal review after an email from a parent. "...an administrator shared the email with her and another librarian, and in order to avoid conflict, they agreed to remove the book from the high school shelves" (Hixenbaugh, 2022b). Librarians and educators are being accused of indoctrinating and grooming students when providing materials that fall under these categories.

A Texas school district is facing a civil rights complaint that has the potential to set a new legal precedent when it comes to book bans. The Granbury Independent School District is currently under investigation by the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights after the ACLU of Texas filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education (Taylor,

2023). Superintendent Jeremy Glenn asked librarians to "remove books with LGBTQ+ themes from the shelves," which resulted in the removal of over 100 books (Taylor, 2023a). Referring to documented homophobic and transphobic comments by Superintendent Glenn, the ACLU of Texas states,"anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment was the reason the books at issue were removed from the district library" (Taylor, 2023b). The ACLU claims this is a violation of Title IX. Having clearly documented bias towards LGBTQ+ people allows the ACLU to file the complaint as illegal discrimination, which sets this complaint apart from others. Should the investigation lead to a lawsuit, it has the ability to set a crucial legal precedent for book removals across the country.

Trends in censorship attempts in schools and public libraries are only the tip of the iceberg. These trends in censorship, including the potential legal precedents in motion, are amplified when it comes to carceral facilities.

Even as book bans and challenges in public schools and public libraries have steadily increased since 2021, the most censorship in the United States occurs in prisons (Jensen, 2023). Across the nation and in the state of Texas, the majority of public knowledge and discourse on the topic of book bans is focused on public schools and libraries, while the strictest restrictions on an underserved and often invisible population remain 'out of sight and out of mind.' Further, as an overarching rule, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) denies access to materials that are perceived as potential security threats (Watson, et al., 2011).
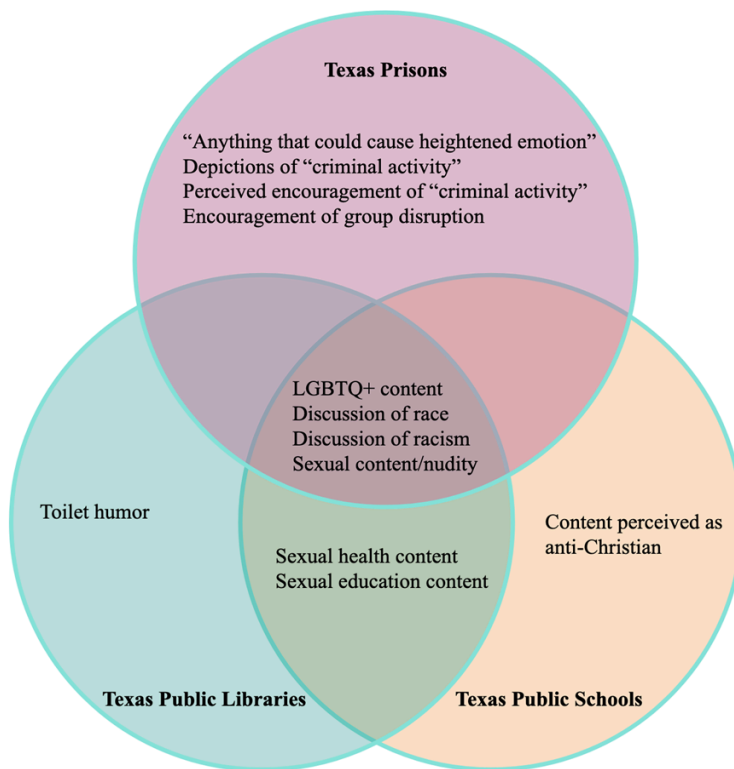
Content-based bans are bans that are implemented based on subject matter and themes depicted in the literature. These restrictions are not solely limited to written text but also apply to photographs, images, drawings, and maps, especially when they are maps of Texas. A 2019 PEN America report discusses additional prohibited items, such as *National Geographic* and anatomy medical reference books as well as "... Salman Rushdie's *Satanic*

Verses, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, and books on the Civil Rights Movement" (pg. 4). The official TDCJ Board Policy outlines all prohibited content, of which the inclusion would result in immediate denial of the book in question. Under this policy, books can be denied for containing content related to sexual content, nudity, or obscenity; racial animus; and depictions of violence, criminal activity, or escape–or language perceived to encourage any of those actions (Cauley, 2020, p. 5). These restriction policies imply the materials could elicit high emotion or motivation to 'cause trouble,' including, but not limited to, mentions of strikes, riots, criminal schemes/illegal activity, police brutality, violence in prisons, and so forth (TDCJ, 2023b). As such, individuals who are in custody of the Texas carceral system won't even get a chance to read a book that they helped authored, as the title TEXAS LETTERS, volumes 1 and 2, "an ongoing anthology of letters written by inmates detailing their experiences with solitary confinement" was immediately and unsurprisingly added to the over 10,000 materials on the TDCJ Banned Books list (Garcia-Galindo, 2024).

Discussion

Trends and Connections between Public Libraries, Schools, and Prisons. Based on our research, across schools, libraries, and prisons in Texas, the most commonly banned and censored themes are those that threaten existing power–themes relating to Black and brown history, the LGBTQ+ community, sexuality, and more, as depicted in Figure 1. We also found that many other challenged themes were categorized as "anti-Christian" or atheist in nature (Torrisi and Brimacombe, 2010, p. 94-101). Book topics that center people of color, slavery, civil rights, transgender history, and sexuality inherently challenge the foundations upon which this country was founded–the very same foundations that uphold white supremacy (Robinson, 2018). Further, one survey respondent from our research wrote, "when banning content, the wealthy/those in power always have a way of opting out" in response to

Fig. 1 Themes Found in Banned Materials

Texas Prisons

"Anything that could cause heightened emotion"
Depictions of "criminal activity"
Perceived encouragement of "criminal activity"
Encouragement of group disruption

LGBTQ+ content
Discussion of race
Discussion of racism
Sexual content/nudity

Toilet humor

Sexual health content
Sexual education content

Content perceived as
anti-Christian

Texas Public Libraries

Texas Public Schools

their strong agreement with the statement "Book bans and challenges disproportionately impact people from marginalized communities." As book bans continue to negatively impact people who have not been afforded power and privilege, those with power can find other sources that allow them the agency to read anything, leaving others without access.

In another example of how book bans demonstrate a stark disparity in power, Austin, et al., (2020) say, "Given the state's near-complete control to determine which information those in prison are able to access, books become an exclusive tool available to prison authorities, granting power to shape behavior in whatever ways preferred by the system" (p. 169-185). Across Texas institutions, the people who have the power to ban books have every incentive to uphold their own power–to be re-elected, to control, to preach–at the expense of people at the margins. Austin, et al. (2020) demonstrate how existing power structures block an individual's right to information:

It is not just access to any book that matters. Instead, it is access to books or information that are desired that provides a feeling of connection between people who are incarcerated and across the carceral institution's walls. The extensive, and often arbitrary, reasons utilized to justify censorship efforts on the part of carceral facilities reflect their investment in maintaining systems of social privilege and oppression that have shaped, and been shaped by, terrains of information access (p. 171).

Censorship is a method of reinforcing systems of oppression and protecting dominant ideologies from being challenged by those with different–often perceived as 'dangerous'–perspectives. Controlling content through erasing identities, suppressing history, and only allowing access to what is deemed palatable ensures that power remains concentrated in the hands of those who benefit from silence and sameness.

How Trends Affect Marginalized Communities. Book bans in public schools are especially harmful for young readers who rely on literature not only for learning but for self-understanding. For students with intersecting marginalized identities—such as queer youth of color—the impact of censorship is especially severe. The removal of books that reflect their lives reinforces a message of exclusion, suggesting that their identities are inappropriate, controversial, or unworthy of recognition. As Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) famously articulated, books serve as "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors"—they allow readers to see themselves, learn about others, and imagine new possibilities. When books representing marginalized identities are removed, those mirrors disappear. This leaves students with fewer opportunities to feel affirmed, understood, or visible within their own educational spaces.

The impact of these bans is not only symbolic but deeply psychological. Emerging research suggests that Black children and teens experience measurable harm to their mental health and sense of belonging when books that affirm their identities are censored or erased from classroom and library spaces (Pickering, 2023). These harms are compounded for youth at the intersections of multiple marginalized identities—such as Black LGBTQ+ students—who are already at greater risk of isolation, discrimination, and reduced access to culturally relevant materials.

Books featuring people of color and the LGBTQ+ community are in the most jeopardy of being removed. Students who identify as a part of these communities experience feelings of isolation when these books are removed from library shelves and how meaningful it is to have access to books that represent and celebrate their identities. A student from Katy, TX told NBC News reporter "As I've struggled with my own identity as a queer person, it's been really, really important to me that I have access to these books. . . You should be able to see yourself reflected on the page" (Hixenbaugh, 2022a). That reflection can be a lifeline—an antidote to shame, confusion, and isolation. When it disappears, so too does a vital tool for self-acceptance and survival.

The Trevor Project's 2024 National Survey on LGBTQ+ Youth Mental Health highlights the stakes: 39% of LGBTQ+ young people seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including 46% of transgender and nonbinary youth. Moreover, 90% of LGBTQ+ youth reported that their well-being was negatively impacted due to recent politics, with 45% of transgender and nonbinary young people considering relocating to another state because of LGBTQ+-related politics and laws (The Trevor Project, 2024). In an increasingly hostile political landscape, the removal of affirming LGBTQ+ narratives from shelves contributes to a culture of erasure that places queer youth at greater risk of isolation and harm.

Furthermore, though it is not harmful in the same way that it is for students with marginalized identities, all children are impacted by the erasure of diversity and the implementation of homogenous narratives. Fellow information professional, Grace Pickering, argues that "children from dominant cultures need to see others represented (windows); this allows them to see they are connected to other people, that they are just one of many ways of being; perhaps they even feel invited in to learn more (sliding doors)" (2023). Without this exposure, students may grow up with limited empathy, cultural understanding, or curiosity about people different from themselves.

This pattern of erasure extends far beyond the classroom. People who are incarcerated—many of whom are Black, brown, queer, or who have multiple intersecting marginalized identities—face even greater restrictions on access to information that reflects their lived experience. As discussed in our document analysis, thousands of titles have been banned in Texas prisons, including books about racial justice, LGBTQ+ identity, and even prison reform. These bans further isolate people who are incarcerated from their communities, their cultures, and their personal development.

When the same themes—race, queerness, resistance, justice—are censored across schools, libraries, and prisons, a troubling pattern emerges. These trends reflect more than discomfort with individual books; they expose a system that seeks to marginalize entire identities and communities. Whether in a school classroom or a prison cell, access to representative literature is a humanizing force. Its removal sends a clear message: some lives, and some stories, are not meant to be seen.

Interventions for Information Professionals. Information professionals are a common thread among schools, libraries, and prisons–all of which have their own librarians, media specialists, and technology support. As individuals and entities who are tasked with safeguarding the right to information, any

challenge to information access should be met with swift action by information professionals, and information professionals can play a vital role in disrupting book bans and censorship attempts. Of note, carceral facilities, while similar in many ways, differ in restrictions, policies, procedures, and leadership; the examples of programs and interventions Austin and other researchers have provided may work for one prison, but not for another. Information professionals can use examples of existing programs to replicate or invent new programs tailored to the incarcerated population in their jurisdiction. Information professionals can look to existing research and practices, such as the aforementioned New York Public Library and San Francisco Public Library, for ideas on how they can expand access to materials for people who are incarcerated in their service areas. Through their education, experience, and positional power, information professionals can help shed light on the injustices people who are incarcerated face and create opportunities for meaningful engagement.

Future Research Questions and Implications. Finally, our research resulted in a number of potential future research questions and implications. Many schools, libraries, and prisons are connected through public funding and stakeholders, further research is necessary to explore other connections. For example, there may be censorship patterns in the school-to-prison pipeline. Does banning books in elementary school affect carceral outcomes for children? If a child doesn't have access to certain books throughout their K-12 education, only to end up in prison where those same books are not allowed, how might this impact that individual's social, economic, political, and cultural growth? Additionally, our research shows that themes of sexuality are among the most banned across all three Texas institutions. Do banned titles on sexuality have implications on the availability and quality of sex and health education for K-12 students? We believe the negative impact of book bans and censorship attempts, particularly on people who are incarcerated and K-12 students, may stretch

farther than current research suggests. In prisons, where access to books is already limited by the nature of carceral facilities, the consequences of banning books are vast, including stripping away the potential for people who are incarcerated to build connections with themselves, their peers, and their communities. Our research has demonstrated the dangers of banning books, but our research only begins to touch on the harms and consequences of banning books for people who are incarcerated–especially people of color and those who identify with the LGBTQ+ community.

In sum, we were able to answer all of our research questions while opening the door for future research opportunities. Our research not only highlights the thousands of banned book titles and themes across Texas–it underscores and supplements existing research as to how book bans and censorship attempts attack individual liberties, particularly for people at the margins, and reinforces the idea that information professionals play a critical role in ensuring everyone has the right to read. Ultimately, our research sheds light on how censorship attempts exist to maintain an unequal distribution of power.

Conclusion

The answers to our research questions boil down to one core concept: systemic oppression. Our research shows that book bans and censorship attempts are more than the loss of a book or a title from circulation–they strip away an individual's power and agency, severing ties to themselves and their communities. Book bans and censorship attempts uphold existing power structures by chipping away at one's freedom of speech and pursuit of happiness–ideas that are woven into our country's fabric but are often not applicable to people at the margins, especially if you are incarcerated or deemed too young to make decisions for yourself. Further, challenging or restricting materials in public libraries, public schools, and prisons have serious implications, ranging from legal challenges to civil rights investigations. On top of legal repercussions, our

research found there is a social-emotional toll of removing, challenging, and restricting access to books–from people who are incarcerated, to youth, to information professionals. Despite the increase in censorship attacks, information professionals have the positional power to fight book challenges and removals. Books can be a source of refuge, joy, and growth. Book bans challenge more than just titles on the shelf: they challenge our fundamental right to read. Our research has demonstrated the dangers of banning books, but only begins to touch on the harms and consequences of banning books for people who are incarcerated, the LGBTQ+ community, and people of color. We hope this paper can be used as a strong foundation for information professionals looking to get more involved in programming fighting censorship attempts–not just in Texas but across the country.

Acknowledgments

References

Acharya, P. (2025, March 19). *Texas Senate approves bill changing how schools select library books.* The Texas Tribune. https://www.texastribune.org/2025/03/05/texas-school-library-book-bans-senate-bill/

American Civil Liberties Union. (2024, September 10). *Little v. Llano County amicus brief.* https://www.aclu.org/cases/little-v-llano-county

American Civil Liberties Union of Texas. (2006, September 23). *Free people read freely:*

10th annual report on banned and challenged books in Texas schools 2005-2006 school year. https://www.aclutx.org/sites/default/files/field_documents/bb2k6.pdf

American Civil Liberties Union of Texas. (2019, October 4). *2018-2019 banned books report on banned books.* https://www.aclutx.org/en/publications/banned-books-2018-2019

American Civil Liberties Union of Texas. (2022, August 26). *Banned book reports.* https://www.aclutx.org/en/banned-book-reports

American Library Association. (n.d.). *ALA policy manual: B.8 services and responsibilities of libraries (Old Number 52)*. Accessed November 14, 2024. https://www.ala.org/aboutala/governance/policymanual

American Library Association. (2023a, April 11). *The state of America's libraries 2023: A report from the American Library Association.* https://www.ala.org/news/state-americas-libraries-report-2023

American Library Association. (2023b, April 20). *Censorship by the numbers.* https://www.ala.org/bbooks/censorship-numbers

American Library Association. (2024, June). *Revisioning standards for library services for the incarcerated or detained.* https://alaeditions.org/standards/

Austin, J. (2022). *Library services and incarceration: Recognizing barriers, strengthening access.* ALA Neal-Schuman.

Austin, J., Charenko, M., Dillon, M. & Lincoln, J. (2020). Systemic oppression and the contested ground of information access for incarcerated people. *Open Information*

Science, 4(1), 169-185.
https://doi.org/10.1515/opis-2020-0013

Birch, S. (2022). A new prohibition era: Book banning, prison abolition, and librarians. *Education for Information, 38*(4), 415–422. https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-220065

Blakinger, K., Murphy, R., Ullendorff, E., & Rodriguez Calderón, A. (2023, February 23). *The books banned in your state's prisons.* The Marshall Project. https://www.themarshallproject.org/2022/12/21/prison-banned-books-list-find-your-state

BraunHagey & Borden LLP. (2022, April 25). *Complaint, Little v. Llano County No. 1:22-Cv-00424-RP.* United States District Court for the Western District of Texas. https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/63290703/1/little-v-llano-county/

Cauley, K. (2020). Banned books behind bars: Prototyping a data repository to combat arbitrary censorship practices in U.S. prisons. *Humanities, 9*(4), 131. https://doi.org/10.3390/h9040131

CBS 7 News. (2023, September 2). *Midland County commissioner releases list of books that could be moved from children's section of library.* https://www.cbs7.com/2023/09/02/midland-county-commissioner-releases-list-books-that-could-be-moved-childrens-section-library/

Congressman Emanuel Cleaver. (2023, April 25). *Reps. Cleaver, Jackson Lee, and Brown Introduce Bill to Advance Reintegration Efforts, Reduce Recidivism, and Increase Educational Opportunities for Incarcerated Individuals* [Press release]. https://cleaver.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/reps-cleaver-jackson-lee-and-brown-introduce-bill-advance-reintegration

Commissioner's Court of Midland County. (2023a). *Notice of meeting of the commissioners court of Midland County, Texas* [Video]. Midland County, TX. https://midlandcountytx.new.swagit.com/videos/208189

———. (2023b). *Notice of meeting of the commissioners court of Midland County, Texas* [Video]. Midland County, TX. https://midlandcountytx.new.swagit.com/videos/269052

———. (2023c). *Notice of meeting of the commissioners court of Midland County, Texas* [Video]. Midland County, TX. https://midlandcountytx.new.swagit.com/videos/271188

———. (2024). *Notice of meeting of the commissioners court of Midland County, Texas* [Video]. Midland County, TX. https://midlandcountytx.new.swagit.com/videos/317654

Court Listener. (2022, April 25). *Docket for Little v. Llano County.* https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/63290703/little-v-llano-county/

Drabinski, E., & Rabina, D. (2015). Reference services to incarcerated people, part I: Themes emerging from answering reference questions from prisons and jails. *Reference & User Services Quarterly, 55*(1), 42–48. https://doi.org/10.5860/rusq.55n1.42

Ellis, D. (2021, November 5). *All 850 books Texas lawmaker Matt Krause wants to ban: An analysis.* BOOK RIOT. https://bookriot.com/texas-book-ban-list/

Garcia-Galindo, Kevin. (2024, October 17). *These Texas inmates wrote a book. Then the prison system banned it.* Reason.

https://reason.com/2024/10/17/these-texas-inmates-wrote-a-book-then-the-prison-system-banned-it/

Garner, J. (2020). Experiencing time in prison: the influence of books, libraries and reading. *Journal of Documentation, 76*(5), 1033–1050. https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-07-2019-0128

Han, K. (2023). The Role of the prison library. *International Journal of Education and Humanities, 9*(3), 108–112. https://doi.org/10.54097/ijeh.v9i3.10320

Hixenbaugh, M. (2022, February 2). *Book banning in Texas schools: Titles are pulled off library shelves in record numbers.* NBC News. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/texas-books-race-sexuality-schools-rcna13886

Inside Books Project. (2024, July). *Inside Books Project resource guide.* https://insidebooksproject.org/resource-guide

Jail and Reentry Services (JARS) | San Francisco Public Library. (n.d.). San Francisco Public Library. Retrieved December 10, 2023. https://sfpl.org/services/jail-and-reentry-services

Jensen, K. (2023, October 30). *Ending censorship applies to prisons, too. A Prison Banned Book Week News Roundup, 2023.* Book Riot. https://bookriot.com/prison-banned-books-week-2023/

Marquis, M., & Luna, J. (2023, October 25). *Reading between the bars: An in-depth look at prison censorship.* PEN America. https://pen.org/report/reading-between-the-bars/

McGaughy, L. (2024, September 26). *Yes to 'Mein Kampf.' No to 'The Color Purple.' Which books are banned in Texas prisons?* Texas Standard. https://www.texasstandard.org/stories/banned-books-list-texas-prison/

McGill, K. (2024, July 7). U.S. *Appeals Court will review its prior order in a Texas county's library book ban case.* PBS News. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/u-s-appeals-court-will-review-its-prior-order-in-a-texas-countys-library-book-ban-case

Meehan, K., Friedman, J., Magnusson, T., & Baêta, S. (2024, November 1). *Banned in the USA: Beyond the shelves.* PEN America. https://pen.org/report/beyond-the-shelves/

National Coalition Against Censorship. (2015, July 13). *Texas library battle over lgbt books.* https://ncac.org/incident/texas-library-battle-over-lgbt-books

Nath, R., Matthews, D.D., DeChants, J.P., Hobaica, S., Clark, C.M., Taylor, A.B., Muñoz, G. (2024). *2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People.* West Hollywood, California: The Trevor Project. www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2024

Osibamowo, T. (2023, October 6). *Literary group accuses Texas prisons of censoring books incarcerated people can receive.* Houston Public Media. https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/criminal-justice/2023/10/09/466010/literary-group-accuses-texas-prisons-of-censoring-books-incarcerated-people-can-receive/

Owens-Murphy, K. (2023). Reading behind bars: literacy and survival in U.S. prison literature. *Humanities, 12*(1), 2. https://doi.org/10.3390/h12010002

Peters, P. (2017, June 15). When a challenge becomes personal. *Intellectual Freedom Blog.* https://www.oif.ala.org/challenge-becomes-personal/

Pickering, G. (2023). "*Harmful to minors*": How book bans hurt adolescent development. *The Serials Librarian, 84*(1–4), 32–45. https://doi-org.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/10.1080/0361526X.2023.2245843

Pitman, R. (2023, March 20). *Order on motion to dismiss, Little v. Llano County.* United States District Court for the Western District of Texas. https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/63290703/133/little-v-llano-county/

Powell, M. (2021, December 10). *In Texas, a battle over what can be taught, and what books can be read.* New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/10/us/texas-critical-race-theory-ban-books.html

Prison Libraries Act of 2023, H.R. 2825, 118th Cong. (2023-2024). https://cleaver.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/cleaver.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/prison-libraries-act-final-text.pdf

Prison Policy Initiative. (n.d.). *Texas Profile.* Accessed November 14, 2024. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/TX.html

Robinson, J. (2018, February 15). Five truths about black history. *American Civil Liberties Union.* https://www.aclu.org/news/racial-justice/five-truths-about-black-history

Simpson, S. (2023, September 6). *Texas prison system issues statewide lockdown to combat illegal drugs, inmate violence.* The Texas Tribune. https://www.texastribune.org/2023/09/06/texas-prisons-contraband-visitors/

Tager, J. (2019, September 24). *Literature locked up: How prison book restriction policies constitute the nation's largest book ban.* PEN America. https://pen.org/report/literature-locked-up-prison-book-bans-report/

Taylor, K. R. (2023). Are book bans a civil rights violation? A federal investigation into a Texas district will decide. *School Library Journal.* https://www.slj.com/story/Are-Book-Bans-a-civil-Rights-Violation-A-Federal-Investigation-into-a-Texas-District-Will-Decide

Texas Department of Criminal Justice. (2023a, September 6). *TDCJ digital mail rollout.* https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/news/digital_mail_rollout.html

Texas Department of Criminal Justice. (2023b, December 15). *Uniform inmate correspondence rules,* BP-03.91 (rev. 7). https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/documents/policy/BP0391.pdf

Texas Legislature. (2025). *Senate Bill 13: Relating to a school district's library materials and catalog, the creation of local school library advisory councils, and parental rights regarding public school library catalogs and access by the parent's child to library materials.* LegiScan. https://legiscan.com/TX/text/SB13/2025

Texas Library Association. (n.d.). *HB 900 implementation.* https://txla.org/advocacy/hb-900-vendor-ratings-for-school-library-materials/hb-900-implementation/

Torrisi, J., & Brimacombe, K. (2010, Fall). Free people read freely: The 14th annual report on challenged and banned books in Texas public schools 2009-2010 School Year. *Texas Library Journal, 86*(3), 94–101. https://txla.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/TLJ-Fall-2010.pdf

Watson, M., Johnston, C. A., Burns, K., Smith, L., Fuselier, J., Sen, R., Aldape, C., Wetzel, J., Buratto, N., Conner, L., Mayeaux, B., Johnson, A., Jackson, N., Medlock, S., & Riquelme, Z. (2011). *Banned books in the Texas prison system: A Texas civil rights project 2011 human rights report.* Texas Civil Rights Project. https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/media/publications/texas_civil_rights_project_prison_book_censorship_report_2011.pdf

Zalusky, S. (2023, March 31). Llano County patrons' anti-censorship lawsuit seeks to put books back on the shelf. *Library Journal.* https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/llano-county-patrons-anti-censorship-lawsuit-seeks-to-put-books-back-on-the-shelf

Facebook and the Biometric Information Privacy Act Litigation

Lesley Rice Montgomery, MLIS
Catalog Librarian II, Tulane University

Abstract

This article will discuss a class action lawsuit that initially was filed in 2015 against – and ultimately was settled by – the social media giant Facebook, Inc. (hereinafter referred to as Facebook), alleging that Facebook had collected and stored Illinois users' biometric data without prior notice or consent, with the action basing the plaintiffs' claims on statutory information found within the Illinois Biometric Information Privacy Act (BIPA) (Gilardi, 2025; IGA, n.d.). "Biometrics" is defined as "the automated recognition of individuals based on their biological and behavioral characteristics from which distinguishing, repeatable biometric features can be extracted for the purpose of biometric recognition" (DHS, 2025). Fingerprints, iris patterns, or facial features can be used for automated recognition, and Facebook's automated facial recognition templates that were created using these features are considered to be biometric data under BIPA (Guariglia, 2021). Discussions first will focus on definitions of facial recognition technologies; on the scope of biometrics collection and use with regard to existing library privacy policies and ALA stances on privacy; and on Facebook's litigation with the Illinois class action plaintiffs *In re Facebook Biometric Information Privacy Litigation Case* No. 3:15 CV 03747 JD, Dkt. No. 537 (N.D. Cal. Feb. 26, 2021) (Feinstein, Nelson & Martens, 2021). The class action privacy case was settled on February 26, 2021, in California federal court. Facebook was ordered to pay $650 million for running afoul of the Illinois BIPA law that was designed to protect Illinois residents from invasive privacy practices. This legal audit will introduce the Illinois BIPA as it relates to the Facebook lawsuits; will discuss how Facebook's development of a face template using facial recognition technology without consent led to plaintiffs' claims of an invasion of social media users' private affairs and concrete interests; and will briefly discuss how the court actions' movements from local Illinois courts to the U.S. District Court for the District of Northern California with consolidation and attainment of class action status allowed both Facebook users and nonusers to seek compensation for privacy violations. The article's conclusion will reemphasize how important it is for academic library staff and other information specialists to become acquainted with legal matters of online privacy, like those raised in the Facebook litigation, as these issues might very well impact the searching habits, online intellectual pursuits or autonomy of patrons who are engaged with libraries' social media or other applications.

Keywords*: automatic facial recognition tagging features; biometric data; online privacy; social media

Article Type: Research Paper

Introduction

The timelines of Facebook's acquisitions of Instagram and WhatsApp and of the implementation and later shutdown of Facebook's facial recognition automatic tagging feature followed an interesting path, and a brief summary of events might lead the reader to a greater understanding of when and why social media users filed numerous lawsuits that addressed issues of user privacy ("History of Facebook," 2025). Facebook first introduced its facial recognition tagging application in December 2010. This feature automatically identified people individually or in a group setting from uploaded photographs and suggested tags to other users. Problems arose when Facebook users realized they were being tagged without their permission by *other* Facebook users. Initial complaints were filed by the Irish Data Protection Commission (IDPC) in 2012, the same year that Facebook acquired Instagram. Complaints by the IDPC led to Facebook suspending the facial recognition feature in Europe. Interestingly, Facebook reinstated facial recognition in Europe in 2018, but added a user-opt-in mechanism to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). GDPR is a European Union law that regulates how personal data is collected, processed and stored (Wolford, 2025). In the meantime, Facebook acquired WhatsApp in February 2014, and by 2015 the Illinois users' class action lawsuit was underway, due to allegations that Facebook had collected and stored Illinois users' biometric data without their prior notice or consent. The subsequent lawsuits led to the discontinuation of this feature in November 2021, when Facebook opted to delete facial recognition templates of more than a billion users (Pesenti, 2021). As a footnote, in 2023 Facebook – now under the control of Meta as of October 28, 2021 – announced via its CEO Mark Zuckerberg, that Meta would start selling verification badges on Instagram and Facebook (Cowley, 2023). These blue "verified" badges assure social media users that they are following a legitimate person. For example, many celebrities now use these badges on their personal social media sites, due to the proliferation of online imposters.

Facebook and the Biometric Information Privacy Act: A Broad Overview of Facial Recognition Technologies and BIPA Litigation

Facial Recognition Technologies

The Illinois Biometric Information Privacy Act (BIPA) was passed on October 3, 2008, with the intent to regulate the collection, storage, use and handling of biometric identifying information by private entities (IGA, n.d.; Kozak, 2021). "Biometrics" is an automated recognition and verification of people, either by themselves or in a group setting, that is based on their biological or behavioral characteristics from which biometric features can be located, identified, analyzed, extracted, compared to stored data of other individual's faces, and later used in various ways (DHS, 2025). Biometric facial recognition identifies or verifies individuals by capturing a template of their face – a digital "faceprint" – and compares it to a database of already known faces. A "face template" or "faceprint" is data that corresponds to an image of someone's face that is unique to their face and is used in a facial recognition system (Guariglia, 2021).

Considered to be a secure alternative to PINs or passwords, this technology is used widely today in a variety of applications, including unlocking smartphones and controlling access to buildings, such as corporate offices, airports or government installations. For example, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security uses biometrics to enforce federal laws, to facilitate legitimate travel and trade, and to enable verification for visa applications to the U.S. (DHS, 2025). The Illinois BIPA litigation that pushed for regulation of this type of identifying information has implications for libraries, ethics of library policies and use, and patron privacy, especially with regard to facial recognition technology, whereby users can unknowingly and without providing any consent be identified on social media platforms they might be using at the library, such as Facebook

(IEEE, 2025). Given the current climate in all types of libraries across the nation where patron privacy is endangered, as well as the increasing presence of law enforcement that is compromising the safety of faculty and students who might be visiting the country on education visas, it is of paramount importance to understand the application of these visual identification techniques (IFLA, 2025).

The technology is quite sophisticated. Facebook previously utilized facial recognition to identify faces – either individually or in groups – that had been uploaded to the platform. The system scanned photos and videos; identified arrangements of features such as eyes, noses and mouths as well as skin tone; extracted unique features like the distance between eyes or the shape of the nose and mouth; and ultimately used a complex algorithm to create a numerical duplicate of each face known as a "faceprint" that was compared to a database of tagged users. Facebook's facial recognition system was extremely accurate at identifying faces. It is important to note that user privacy potentially was compromised whenever the system suggested to other Facebook users that they could tag the person who was both unaware of and had not given consent to the fact they had been identified by this facial recognition technology (Guariglia, 2021). So, while Facebook's facial recognition data collection and surveillance is not used by libraries per se, the availability and use of this information on social media platforms and other applications does raise privacy concerns and ethical considerations because of the potential for misuse (IEEE, 2025).

Facebook's facial recognition relates to library patron privacy in numerous ways, including the erosion of anonymity and autonomy, whereby patrons might be discouraged from or even afraid of exploring library resources, feeling they are being watched or judged. This chilling effect can prevent patrons from freely pursuing their intellectual activities and can hamper free expression and association (IEEE, 2025). Although Facebook's system is not used in

libraries, the widespread use of these technologies can lead to breaches of facial recognition databases, leaving individuals working on library computers potentially vulnerable to data collection by outside entities (IFLA, 2025). Indeed, ethical considerations vis-à-vis facial recognition are far reaching, from privacy concerns to questions of data security and consent (IEEE, 2025; IFLA, 2025).

The potential impacts on libraries and on patron privacy, autonomy and use of resources are based in part on the erosion of key principles of entities such as the American Library Association and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. Library users have a right to anonymity and library staff have a mandate not to disclose the identity of users or the materials they use to third parties, and these key tenets are relevant today due to increasingly pervasive online surveillance (ALA, 2025; IFLA, 2025). In fact, the American Library Association published a resolution opposing the use of facial recognition technologies in libraries stating, "The use of facial recognition technology is inherently inconsistent with the *Library Bill of Rights* and other ALA policies that advocate for user privacy, oppose user surveillance, and promote anti-racism, equity, diversity, and inclusion" (ALA, 2025). This resolution arose out of a survey distributed in 2020 by the Intellectual Freedom Committee's Facial Recognition Working Group to ascertain the library community's overall level of knowledge and concern about facial recognition software (ALA, 2025). The working group created the detailed resolution using information received from 628 respondents and additional clauses were adopted by ALA's Council on January 26, 2021, subsequent to endorsement by the Committee on Library Advocacy Intellectual Freedom Round Table (ALA, 2025). It should be emphasized that the *Library Bill of Rights'* policies firmly support user privacy and confidentiality, which "…is necessary for intellectual freedom and fundamental to the ethics and practices of librarianship" (ALA, 2025). Interpretations of the *Library Bill of Rights* maintain that this includes advocacy for and education about the issue of

library users' right to be protected from surveillance of their lawful library use (ALA, 2025; IFLA, 2025). Additional clauses state in part, that "use of facial recognition systems is invasive and outweighs any benefit for library use" and ALA "opposes the use of facial recognition software in libraries of all types on the grounds that its implementation breaches users' and library workers' privacy and user confidentiality, thereby having a chilling effect on the use of library resources" (ALA, 2025). While it is beyond the scope of this article to delineate the entire resolution, it should be noted that the American Library Association provides a thorough literature review reference list and a detailed analysis of the resolution on their facial recognition resolution site (ALA, 2025).

BIPA Litigation

Regarding the BIPA litigation, Illinois is not the only state that has recognized and addressed the issue of user privacy on social media platforms. Several other U.S. states besides Illinois have biometric privacy laws, including Texas, Washington, California, New York and Arkansas, but aside from Texas and Washington State, Illinois is the only other state that enforces biometric protection and its BIPA regulations are the most stringent (BIPA, 2024; Channick, 2021; Kozak, 2021). The Act requires companies to obtain users' permission prior to utilizing facial recognition technologies to identify platform users (Channick, 2021). Private entities must formulate "a written policy, schedule, and guidelines about collection, retention, and destruction" of biometric identifier data; must provide disclosures and obtain written releases prior to collecting the data; must restrict biometric information dissemination; and must provide for private rights of action (Kozak, 2021). Typically, BIPA claims provide "…private right[s] of action to recover potentially astronomical damages for inadvertent use or disclosure of biometric data like fingerprints, face scans, or voiceprints by businesses" (KDW, 2021). In *re Facebook Biometric Information Privacy Litigation* class members alleged that Facebook had collected, stored and subsequently used

digital facial scans "…without prior notice or consent in violation of Sections 15(a) and 15(b) of the Illinois Biometric Information Privacy Act… 740 Ill. Comp. Stat. 14/1 et seq. (2008)" (Feinstein, Nelson & Martens, 2021). Specifically, the complaint alleged that "Facebook violates the statute by virtue of its facial recognition software that collects and stores biometric information, in the form of face templates extracted from photographs uploaded to the website, in connection with its 'Tag Suggestions' feature without first obtaining informed written consent" (LS, 2021).

The class members who are eligible to benefit from the settlement are defined as residents of the State of Illinois who lived in the state for at least six months who are also "Facebook users located in Illinois for whom Facebook created and stored a face template after June 7, 2011" (Gilardi, 2025). The case initially was filed in 2015 in Cook County Circuit Court, Illinois; subsequently was moved to Chicago federal court; and finally was litigated in California federal court, at which time it attained the class action status (Channick, 2021). On February 26, 2021, Judge James Donato granted final approval of the proposed class action settlement, with the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California entering a final judgment on this biometric privacy class action lawsuit brought against Facebook on April 12, 2021 (Feinstein, Nelson & Martens, 2021; Gilardi, 2025). Facebook was ordered to pay $650 million for running afoul of the Illinois BIPA law that was "designed to protect the state's residents from invasive privacy practices" when "Facebook's practice of tagging people in photos using facial recognition without their consent violated state law" (Hatmaker, 2021). The Court approved payments in the amount of $345 for each of the 1.6 million class members who are Illinois residents (Channick, 2021; Osborne, 2021). The U.S. District Judge Donato called this settlement, "…one of the largest privacy settlements ever and a 'major win for consumers in the hotly contested area of digital privacy' with more than one in five eligible Illinois Facebook

users" participating in the settlement (Channick, 2021; Osborne, 2021).

The settlement was indeed record-breaking in amount, yet it was "still significantly below the statutory damages of $1,000 and $5,000 provided by BIPA" (Perdew & Trifon, 2020). This lesser settlement, which was largely a result of the court-awarded attorneys' fees of $97.5 million, led to a couple of class members filing an appeal with the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. That meant payments could not be made to other class members. The objections by class members Dawn Frankfother and Cathy Flanagan concerning whether the settlement amount was large enough resulted in a delay (Channick, 2021; Gilardi, 2025). The appeals court initially scheduled oral arguments for February 17, 2022. As one might imagine, other class members were not happy about this situation and asked Class Counsel to expedite the docket schedule, but Counsel said, "Frankfother and Flanagan have refused to expedite the appeal and the Ninth Circuit rejected Class Counsel's request to do so" (Gilardi, 2025). Ultimately, on March 17, 2022, the United States Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit stated in part that it held, "the $5,000 incentive awards to Named Plaintiffs were not an abuse of discretion [when paying the attorneys' fees]" (Casetext, 2022).

Facebook's Facial Recognition Software: How its use led to BIPA Violations and Continuing Infractions of Personal Privacy

In the matter of *Facebook Biometric Information Privacy Litigation*, Facebook denied that it had violated any law when the plaintiffs brought their claim against the platform. Class action litigants stated that Facebook's "Tag Suggestions" feature, among other features, used facial recognition technology (Gilardi, 2025). Plaintiffs alleged that Facebook's facial recognition technology not only violated Illinois' Biometric Information Privacy Act, but also that they had been subjected to "…a concrete and particularized harm… because BIPA protected the plaintiffs' concrete privacy interest, and violations of the procedures in BIPA actually

harmed or posed a material risk of harm to those privacy interests. Specifically… the development of a face template using facial recognition technology without consent (as alleged in this case) invades an individual's private affairs and concrete interests" (EPIC, 2021).

It should be noted that as a result of yearlong FTC investigations and subsequent court actions, in 2019 Facebook disabled its automatic facial recognition tagging features by making this an optional application; promised users that they can control their personal information through Facebook's privacy settings; and thereby addressed some of the privacy issues that Illinois plaintiffs initially raised in their class action suit (FTC, 2019; Hatmaker, 2021). However, in August 2020, yet another class action lawsuit was filed in a San Mateo, California state court by a user of Instagram – a platform also owned by Facebook. New allegations stated that via Instagram, Facebook was "…actively collecting, storing, disclosing, profiting from, and otherwise using biometric information of… more than 100 million users without any written notice or informed written consent, including millions of Illinois residents" (TFL, 2020). These allegations were particularly concerning, because the FTC's 2019 order-mandated privacy program, which covered Facebook's WhatsApp and Instagram, required Facebook "to conduct a privacy review of every new or modified product, service, or practice before it is implemented, and document its decisions about user privacy" (FTC, 2019). While this San Mateo court filing will not be discussed in this case study, the Instagram users' allegations shed some light on how and why the social media giant used the biometric gathering features. For example, whenever users upload images to Instagram or Facebook, the biometrics are used to "…bolster its facial recognition abilities across all of its products, including the Facebook application, and shares this information among various entities," including Facebook's IT teams as well as third parties, such as "…other apps, websites, and third-party integrations, [and] Facebook's partners, including vendors and service providers" (TFL, 2020). This is a possible

indication that financial benefits of facial recognition technologies trumped the costs of potential litigations. In fact, the Instagram litigant asserted that profits obtained from the use of protected biometrics helped the company "…to expand the datasets which enable its facial recognition software, and to cement its market-leading position in facial recognition and social media" (TFL, 2020). It should be noted that while Facebook stopped using facial recognition technologies on its platform in November 2021, Meta, Facebook's parent company, is still researching biometrics and can incorporate face signatures and track facial or users' eye movements in virtual reality headsets, as an example (Heilweil, 2021). Virtual reality technology is relatively new, and there are no specific regulations regarding the collection, storage and use of biometric data from VR headsets (Bloomberg, 2025). Also, in July 2024, the Texas Attorney General secured a $1.4 billion settlement with Meta. The 2022 lawsuit filed in state court alleged that Meta had been collecting and using biometric data from photographs that had been uploaded to Facebook without Texans' consent (Paxton, 2024). Proposals are ongoing at both local and federal levels to regulate how facial recognition is used by private companies.

The Issue of Complaints Filed on Behalf of Both Users and Nonusers of Facebook

After researching Facebook's infractions of the 2008 Illinois Biometric Information Privacy Act, it is clear why some users filed lawsuits against the social media platform for its collection, use and handling of biometric identifiers and users' personal information without prior notice or consent. What is not readily apparent is why both class members and *nonusers* of Facebook would merit damage reparations. In part, this has to do with court jurisdiction, but the overriding factor is whenever Facebook's actions lead to privacy violations, misuse of personal data, or whenever harm is caused by Facebook's algorithms and business practices, then both users and nonusers potentially can be granted damage reparations (TGC, 2025). Also, types of

damages can vary, depending on each case's circumstances. For example, Facebook nonusers can seek compensation for privacy violations via class action lawsuits (LS, 2021).

In re Facebook Biometric Information Privacy Litigation included people who were not direct users of the platform. In the instance of the Illinois BIPA litigation, nonusers had grounds for receiving reparations when Facebook collected, stored or used their biometric data without their knowledge or consent. Initially filed in 2015 in Cook County Circuit Court, Illinois, the case subsequently was moved to Chicago federal court, and finally was litigated in California federal court, at which time it attained the class action status (Channick, 2021). The *In re Facebook* settlement was reached by three law firms that represented the plaintiff class. A Chicago law firm, Edelson PC, filed the first suit against Facebook for its alleged Illinois Biometrics law violations. Labaton Sucharow LLP is known for prosecuting precedent-setting class and direct actions and is the law firm that filed a class action complaint on April 21, 2015, on behalf of Illinois Facebook users and nonusers who were negatively impacted by alleged violations of the Illinois BIPA by Facebook (LS, 2021). Robbins Geller Rudman & Dowd LLP also filed against Facebook; the cases were consolidated and transferred to the U.S. District Court in San Francisco; and thereafter the three firms jointly litigated *in re Facebook* before Judge James Donato, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the U.S. Supreme Court which declined to hear the case (Channick, 2021; LS, 2021).

The *In re Facebook* cash settlement was the largest ever for resolving a privacy-related lawsuit. However, because the settlement was on behalf of a class of consumers, it was "subject to and not effective until [it was] approved by the District Court presiding over the case" (Channick, 2021; LS, 2021). On February 26, 2021, Labaton Sucharow did obtain final approval of the $650 million settlement *In re Facebook* after five years of litigation before the Honorable Judge James Donato, the Ninth

Circuit Court of Appeals, and the U.S. Supreme Court (LS, 2021).

Final Considerations: Ramifications of In re Facebook on Social Media Use in Libraries

Since modern libraries and other information entities provide news and events, information services and resources digitally, it is of paramount importance that library staff and other information technology specialists are fully cognizant of legal issues that might impact the privacy of online users (Sumadevi & Kumbar, 2019). Unraveling some of the knotty issues raised during various litigations pertaining to *In re Facebook* would prove useful for professional library staff and other information specialists as they attempt to follow best practices when assisting online patrons. Additionally, modern libraries occasionally have "sign up for social media" classes that specifically encourage patrons to use social media. Many libraries also have an institutionally based social media presence and often will encourage patrons to "follow" the libraries. Given that patrons primarily interact with these platforms by posting photographic images and/or videos of themselves, an investigation of the legal responsibilities of libraries vis-à-vis First Amendment considerations, third-party responsibility, data collection, and user privacy, would provide much beneficial advice for librarians and other information technology professionals who need to be familiar with these issues when working online, when providing reference services, or when otherwise aiding their library users in the online environment.

Invasive privacy practices threaten online patrons who use social media platforms. This is an unfortunate modern day truism, borne out by the simple fact that Facebook is not the only online entity that regularly compromises online users' private affairs and anonymity. In 2020, numerous lawsuits were filed that accused Microsoft, Google and Amazon of breaking BIPA mandates after Illinois residents' faces were used by these entities' software programs to train the companies' facial recognition systems

without having first obtained explicit consent (Hatmaker, 2021). Also in 2020, Baer Law LLC filed the first BIPA class action lawsuit in the United States against TikTok for allegedly collecting facial data from users without their consent, which was preliminarily approved for a proposed $92 million settlement on behalf of TikTok users in twenty-one class action cases (Baer Law LLC, 2021). Indeed, the list of lawsuits is ongoing to this day, with a wide variety of companies being brought to court for violating individuals' privacy and control over personal identifiers. That being said, while library staff already adhere to the *Library Bill of Rights* and other ALA policies and principles, they need to be mindful of any legal obligations to protect their patrons' privacy. For example, libraries are considered to be a public space with no clear expectation of privacy, so can libraries that use Facebook and other social media be held legally liable for utilizing tagging biometrics?

First and foremost, the American Library Association's *Library Bill of Rights* is considered the primary source of protection for library users' privacy, confidentiality and intellectual freedom. Libraries are protected from liability pertaining to third-party content and social media postings by the Communications Decency Act (CDA), §230 (Zeigler, 2024). However, with the consultation of legal counsel, they must ensure that their own policies and practices are succinct and updated, outline the collection and use of patron data, and comply with privacy laws (ALA, 2019). Libraries must comply with federal and state laws that apply to the collection, record-retention, use and sharing of personally identifiable information, such as when law enforcement officers request information with a proper court order (ALA, 2019; IFLA, 2015). Library staff are advised to encourage users to be aware of their privacy when they are posting online, yet libraries cannot restrict First Amendment speech on private social media platforms as per the CDA, §230 (Zeigler, 2024). Limiting freedom of speech also can potentially compromise civil engagement and democracy (IFLA, 2015). Library data collection and use on social media including the creation of user profiles should align with their

organization's privacy policies. Regarding best practices, libraries should refrain from storing personal data, such as information written on patron sign-in sheets, and should only collect data that is absolutely necessary to provide library services. For example, it is not a good idea to file sign-in sheets with personal information on an unprotected shelf or under a reference desk or digitize the sheets and upload them to a shared computer. Large scale data collection can have a chilling effect on users, who might self-censor their search behaviors or intellectual pursuits, so user information should be protected digitally and physically (IFLA, 2015).

Conclusion

The Illinois Biometric Information Privacy Act is one facet of a regulatory system that is increasingly threatening the way tech companies have done business for a couple of decades. Regulatory agencies at the federal and state levels are attempting to rein in tech giants and the landmark Illinois law presents a compelling framework to mitigate some of the more blatant infringements on users' privacy by social media platforms like Facebook (Hatmaker, 2021). Modern librarians, library staff and other information entities heavily rely on the American Library Association's *Library Bill of Rights* for guidance when implementing organizational best practices. Due to a lack of federal oversight vis-à-vis patron privacy and because libraries increasingly use social media to provide useful and timely information about resources, services, news and events, and even to promote library branding, it is of paramount importance that library staff and other information technology specialists are fully cognizant of issues that might impact the privacy of online users (Sumadevi & Kumbar, 2019; Xie & Stevenson, 2014). An important caveat to the increased use of social media by patrons and branding of libraries via visually based online platforms is that libraries should approach social media sites and other applications cautiously, taking into account previous egregious breaches of patron privacy and autonomy. Library administrators

must acknowledge the definition of biometrics that the Illinois General Assembly noted in legislative documentation when creating the Illinois BIPA: "Biometrics are unlike other unique identifiers that are used to access finances or other sensitive information. For example, social security numbers, when compromised, can be changed. Biometrics, however, are biologically unique to the individual; therefore, once compromised, the individual has no recourse, is at heightened risk for identity theft, and is likely to withdraw from biometric-facilitated transactions" (IGA, n.d.). It is a simple fact that posts containing an image or images tend to attract more users (Joo, Choi, & Baek, 2018). Users who are increasingly engaging with libraries' social media sites and other applications need to have their privacy protected against facial recognition technologies that are being misused by tech companies, and this is even more critical when the patrons are posting their facial images online or using "tag suggestion" features or other biometric identifier applications. These crucial protections are delineated in the *Library Bill of Rights* which firmly asserts, "All people, regardless of origin, age, background, or views, possess a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use. Libraries should advocate for, educate about, and protect people's privacy, safeguarding all library use data, including personally identifiable information (ALA, 2025)." These key tenets along with the American Library Association's resolution opposing the use of facial recognition technologies in libraries will guide librarians and library staff as they continue to advocate for user privacy, to oppose user surveillance, and to promote anti-racism, equity, diversity, and inclusion within their institutions.

References

American Library Association (ALA). (2019). Guidelines for library policies. *American Library Association.* https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarypolicyguidelines

American Library Association (ALA). (2025). Resolution in opposition to facial recognition software in libraries. *American Library Association.* https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/facialrecognitionresolution

Baer Law LLC. (2021, March 10). Baer Law LLC initiated the first Biometric Information Privacy Act (BIPA) class action lawsuit in US against TikTok [Article]. *Baer Law Newsletter.* https://www.baerlawllc.com/blog/class-action-lawsuit-against-tiktok

Biometric Information Privacy Act (BIPA). (2024, September 27). In *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biometric_Information_Privacy_Act

Bloomberg. (2025). VR headsets give enough data for AI to accurately guess ethnicity, income and more. *Bloomberg Technology.* https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-08-10/meta-s-virtual-reality-headset-quest-2-has-privacy-concerns

Casetext. (2022, March 17). Patel v. Frankfother (*In re Facebook Biometric Information Privacy Litigation*), 2022 WL 822923 (9th Cir. 2022). https://casetext.com/case/patel-v-frankfother-in-re-facebook-biometric-info-privacy-litig/

Channick, R. (2021, April 6). Waiting for your $345 from the Illinois Facebook privacy settlement? Here's why it's delayed. *The Pantagraph.* https://pantagraph.com/news/state-and-regional/crime-and-courts/waiting-for-your-345-from-the-illinois-facebook-privacy-settlement-here-s-why-it-s/article_32e7a39b-5d1b-5b85-931b-1ffd1dee175f.html

Cowley, S. (2023, February 19). Facebook parent plans to sell 'Meta verified' accounts. *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/19/business/meta-facebook-instagram-verified-accounts.html

Department of Homeland Security (DHS). (2025). *Biometrics.* U.S. Department of Homeland Security. https://www.dhs.gov/biometrics

Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC). (2021). *Patel v. Facebook: U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.* https://epic.org/documents/patel-v-facebook/

Federal Trade Commission (FTC). (2019, July 24). FTC imposes $5 billion penalty and sweeping new privacy restrictions on Facebook. *FTC Newsletter.* https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2019/07/ftc-imposes-5-billion-penalty-sweeping-new-privacy-restrictions

Feinstein, A., Nelson, P., & Martens, K. (2021, March 22). Judge allows Facebook to settle facial scanning suit for $650 million. *JD Supra.* https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/judge-allows-facebook-to-settle-facial-6231285/

Gilardi & Co. LLC (Gilardi). (2025). *Facebook biometric information privacy litigation.* https://www.facebookbipaclassaction.com/

Guariglia, M. (2021, November 2). Face recognition is so toxic, Facebook is dumping it. *Electronic Frontier Foundation.* https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2021/11/face-recognition-so-toxic-facebook-dumping-it?language=en

Hatmaker, T. (2021, March 1). Facebook will pay $650 million to settle class action suit centered on Illinois privacy law. *TechCrunch.* https://techcrunch.com/2021/03/01/facebook-illinois-class-action-bipa/

Heilweil, R. (2021, November 3). Facebook is backing away from facial recognition. Meta isn't. *Vox.* https://www.vox.com/recode/22761598/facebook-facial-recognition-meta

History of Facebook. (2025, May 17). In *Wikipedia.* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Facebook

Illinois General Assembly (IGA). (n.d.). Civil liabilities (740 ILCS 14/) *Biometric Information Privacy Act.* https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=3004&ChapterID=57

Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). (2025). Ethical considerations in the use of facial recognition for public safety. *Public Safety Technology.* https://publicsafety.ieee.org/topics/ethical-considerations-in-the-use-of-facial-recognition-for-public-safety/

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). (2015, August 15). IFLA statement on privacy in the library environment. *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.* https://www.ifla.org/publications/ifla-statement-on-privacy-in-the-library-environment/

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). (2025). Facial recognition, libraries, and intellectual freedom. *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.* https://blogs.ifla.org/faife/2019/08/19/facial-recognition-libraries-and-intellectual-freedom/

Joo, S., Choi, N., & Baek, T. H. (2018, September 13). Library marketing via social media: The relationships between Facebook content and user engagement in public libraries. *Online Information Review*, 42(6), 940-955.

https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/OIR-10-2017-0288/full/pdf?title=library-marketing-via-social-media-the-relationships-between-facebook-content-and-user-engagement-in-public-libraries

Kelley Drye & Warren LLP (KDW). (2021, May 18). Court to decide if insurance covers biometric data claims in BIPA dispute. *JD Supra.* https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/court-to-decide-if-insurance-covers-4436095/

Kozak, N. I. (2021). *Global internet jurisdiction* [Lecture recording]. Canvas.

Kozak, N. I. (2021). *Internet-related privacy* [Lecture recording]. Canvas.

Labaton Sucharow (LS). (2021, February 26). *In re Facebook Biometric Information Privacy Litigation.* https://www.labaton.com/cases/in-re-facebook-biometric-information-privacy-litigation

Osborne, C. (2021, March 1). Judge approves $650m settlement for Facebook users in privacy, biometrics lawsuit. *Zero Day.* https://www.zdnet.com/article/judge-approves-650m-settlement-for-facebook-users-in-privacy-biometrics-lawsuit/

Paxton, K. (2024, July 30). Attorney General Ken Paxton secures $1.4 billion settlement with Meta over its unauthorized capture of personal biometric data in largest settlement ever obtained from an action brought by a single state [Press release]. https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/news/releases/attorney-general-ken-paxton-secures-14-billion-settlement-meta-over-its-unauthorized-capture

Perdew, P. R., & Trifon, T. L. (2020, July 24). Locke Lord quick study: When half a billion dollars is not enough: What the Facebook settlement can teach us. *Troutman Pepper Locke.*

https://www.lockelord.com/newsandevents/publications/2020/07/facebook-settlement.

Pesenti, J. (2021, November 2). Facebook: An update on our use of face recognition [Press release]. https://about.fb.com/news/2021/11/update-on-use-of-face-recognition/

Sumadevi, S., & Kumbar, M. (2019, December). Use of social media to promote library services in the digital age. *ResearchGate.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337673976_Use_of_Social_Media_to_Promote_Library_Services_in_the_Digital_Age

The Fashion Law Media (TFL). (2020, August 13). Facebook is allegedly collecting, sharing Instagram users' biometric data without their consent [Law article]. https://www.thefashionlaw.com/facebook-is-allegedly-collecting-sharing-instagram-users-biometric-data-without-their-consent/

Today's General Counsel (TGC). (2025). Non-Facebook users sue Meta over facial data privacy. *Today's Legal Operations.* https://todaysgeneralcounsel.com/non-facebook-users-sue-meta-over-facial-data-privacy/

Wolford, B. (2025). What is GDPR, the EU's new data protection law? *GDPR.EU.* https://gdpr.eu/what-is-gdpr/

Xie, I., & Stevenson, J. (2014). Social media application in digital libraries. *Online Information Review*, *38*(4), 502-523. https://www-emerald-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/insight/content/doi/10.1108/OIR-11-2013-0261/full/pdf

Zeigler, S. L. (2024, July 5). Communications Decency Act and Section 230 (1996). *Free Speech Center at Middle Tennessee State University.* https://firstamendment.mtsu.edu/article/communications-decency-act-and-section-230/

Book Reviews

Hicks, A., Lloyd, A. & O. Pilerot (Eds.) (2024). *Information Literacy Through Theory*. Facet Publishing.

Practitioner literature, where those "in the trenches" record the experience of their professional roles, makes up the plurality of scholarly literature in Library and Information Science (LIS). Less represented is theoretical literature, where high-level abstractions used to structure research perspectives are investigated and developed. While practitioner literature offers guidance and contributes to professional culture across the field, the relative neglect of theoretical literature can leave researchers and practitioners with only easy-to-hand notions to direct their work. This lack of theory can be especially felt in the pursuit of information literacy, where the political charge of the information literacy movement leaves only cursory answers to basic questions like "what is information literacy?" and "how is information literacy learned?" These questions, far from being purely academic, structure the foundation of our work.

Information Literacy Through Theory offers a panoramic view of the theories in force in contemporary information literacy research, especially in how they relate to a building consensus defining information literacy as social practices shared in specific contexts as opposed to a discrete and universal skillset. Each of its 13 chapters introduces a distinct information literacy theory and theoretically-grounded approaches to research — accessible to the unfamiliar without losing the theory's rich detail. In lieu of organized chapter sections, the editors bookend the volume with reflections on the themes that reach across the chapters — this horizontal structure promotes generative connections between the various theories. Preeminent LIS professionals contribute to this collection, which represents the state of the art in information literacy research.

Because of the stark contrast of perspectives each chapter presents, it's worth highlighting particular examples. Chapter 4, written by Arthur Coelho Bezerra and Marco Schneider, outlines Brazilian studies on critical information literacy and its theoretically informed praxis. The transcontinental developments of critical information literacy have turned the individually constrained perspective of information literacy towards "the emancipation of society as a whole (p. 57)." While it may be familiar across academic librarianship through the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, less familiar are the Marxist influences in Freire's work. Reflecting on the "radioactive" Marx's contributions to the radical Freire, the chapter calls for the theoretical enrichment of information literacy.

Looking at information literacy through an equity mindset, Amanda L. Folk's contribution in Chapter 8 effectively overviews an orientation to information literacy that addresses historic and ongoing sources of inequality present in information systems and educational institutions. Research in information literacy that follows from this orientation brings into focus the "contact zones" between privileged and marginalized identities that establish social conditions where learning is inequitably painful and exhausting for students. This research can empower practitioners to reformulate their institutions rather than try to "fix" students.

The final chapter by editor Ola Pilerot features institutional ethnography as an effective and robust method of information literacy research. In recognition of both the local institutional contexts

of specific social practices and the influential force of trans-local institutions across massive and distributed social groups (for instance, professional librarianship and its influence at individual libraries), institutional ethnography provides a research perspective that captures information literacy at multiple scales simultaneously. The theoretical structure underlying institutional ethnography allows the specificity of practices as they are performed to shape our understanding of information literacy practices writ large.

These three chapters, along with the rest of the book, exemplify theoretical knowledge offering structure and motive force to researchers and practitioners in equal measure. Theory and practice, as these chapters prove, are best realized when each draw upon the other.

Reviewed by Jon Schoenfelder, Assistant Professor and Instructional Services Librarian, Lycoming College.

———————————————

Wintermute, H.E., Campbell, H.M., Dieckman, C.S., Rose, N.L., & Thulsidhos, H. (2024). *The DEI Metadata Handbook: A Guide to Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Description*. Iowa State University Digital Press. https://doi.org/10.31274/isudp.2024.153

The DEI Metadata Handbook breaks down the basic concepts of diverse, equitable, and inclusive description in an easy-to-read primer. The chapters are split up into major metadata work: name authorities, persons and groups, classification, and subject headings, along with chapters on inclusive description and accessibility.

Each chapter provides an overview of the topic before diving into how it was handled in the past and how it is being handled today. It shows how to work within the standard systems, such as revamping the Dewey 200s to better include all religions, or to choose an alternative option, such as using the Brian Deer Classification system. There are also examples and cases of practical work, either done by the authors or other librarians. The end of each chapter includes a list and URLs of the resources mentioned.

The authors, H. E. Wintermute, Heather M. Campbell, Christopher S. Dieckman, Nausicaa L. Rose, and Hema Thulsidhos, show a clear respect for workers and the communities they serve. The focus is on doing work that will have the most impact on the institutions' patrons and the idea that incremental change can be as impactful as major change. A brief section in chapter one discusses how to outreach with community members to assure the work the institution does best reflects the communities' lived experience. Inclusive description additions range from small—creating a harmful language statement—to more complex—identifying harmful or biased language that needs to be redacted, edited, annotated, or access restricted.

Its slim size (ninety-six pages), short chapters, and clear themes allow readers to read each chapter as a standalone. This is helpful to a busy librarian who may not have as much dedicated time to do research on this topic. For librarians who have more knowledge, the list of resources is the most beneficial and can aid in new inclusive description work. The book is also open access, allowing institutions or individuals with limited funds access to information on inclusive description.

While this book is not without its plentiful examples and resources, it does skew towards academic libraries. Most of the examples are from academic libraries and suggest inclusive description within the context of MARC 21, Library of Congress Classification (LCC), and Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSHs). A few chapters do include examples or references to BIBFRAME, Metadata Objective Descriptive Schema (MODS), Dublin Core and other metadata schema, controlled vocabulary, and classifications. Librarians who do not use these may have to search for their own examples or reference points.

DEI work has been at the forefront for much of the discussion in the last five years in libraries, with metadata and cataloging being no exception. This book allows librarians to tackle this work in a practical, ethical way; while still acknowledging the varied limitations that institutions experience.

This book is best for students, early-career librarians, and those new to inclusive description.

Reviewed by B.L. Hendrickson, Cataloging Librarian and Assistant Professor, Pittsburg State University.

Jackson, A. P., DeLoach, M. L., & Fenton, M. (Eds.). (2024). *Handbook of Black Librarianship.* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated.

Handbook of Black Librarianship (3rd Edition) is a powerful and timely collection that brings together history, personal testimony, and institutional critique to examine Black librarianship's past, present, and future in the United States. Building on the legacy of E. J. Josey and other trailblazers, this updated volume does not just revisit past contributions—it demands a reckoning with the systems that continue to marginalize Black professionals in library and information science (LIS).

The book's central message is clear: despite decades of advocacy and policy work, the profession remains profoundly unequal. Black librarians—and BIPOC librarians more broadly—continue to face exclusion, underrepresentation, and workplace toxicity. The editors spotlight this contradiction with striking statistics: while BIPOC individuals make up around 40% of the U.S. population, they account for just 13.9% of credentialed librarians. This gap is not simply a reflection of pipeline issues; it reveals deeper structural barriers that persist across generations.

The volume is most substantial when it weaves historical context and personal experience together. For example, it pairs archival material about early training programs for Black librarians, like Thomas Fountain Blue's 1912 apprenticeship program, with current-day accounts of burnout and microaggressions. These juxtapositions show how much has changed, and how much has not.

A particularly compelling thread in the handbook critiques how many equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives fall short. Instead of creating real opportunities, some programs—such as ALA's Emerging Leaders or ACRL's Diversity Alliance—are framed as competitive and unsustainable. For example, the number of institutions participating in the Diversity Alliance dropped from 58 to just 19, raising questions about long-term commitment. The contributors argue that these programs often serve institutions more than individuals. They also push back on "resilience" narratives, with Piper (2024) reflecting on difficulties during their residency librarian experience that "I despise the concept of 'resiliency.' Proper mentorship from the jump… would have shortened my stay (89). Such moments reveal how the profession's failure to support its Black members entirely can cause lasting harm.

Perhaps the handbook's most radical and exciting aspect is how it redefines librarianship itself. The contributors argue that Black communities have long built their own knowledge systems—well before LIS became a formal discipline. From mutual aid societies to the information hierarchies of the queer ballroom scene, the book urges LIS professionals to look beyond traditional institutions and recognize the sophisticated, often overlooked frameworks created by marginalized communities. This shift in perspective invites librarians to act less like gatekeepers and more like collaborators and learners. On this subject, Aminou (2024) notes in their chapter, "We must look outside institutions and work with organizers and activists" (125).

This book will resonate with a wide range of readers. For library administrators and EDI leaders, it provides sobering critiques and guidance for real change, not just symbolic gestures. For early-career librarians, particularly those from historically excluded backgrounds, it validates lived experiences and warns of everyday challenges. It is also highly relevant to education, information studies, and social justice scholars examining why diversity initiatives often fall short.

While the book is rich in analysis and personal insight, some readers may wish for more specific roadmaps. The calls for multi pronged approaches and organizational restructuring are compelling, but practical examples and implementation case studies would strengthen

the argument. The proposed restructuring of the American Library Association (ALA), for example, is bold, but it would benefit from models or scenarios that help readers imagine what such a transformation could realistically look like.

Handbook of Black Librarianship is more than a reference—it is a call to action. It honors the work of past leaders like E. J. Josey and Carla Hayden while pushing the field to live up to its professed values. The volume challenges the idea that slow progress is enough, offers a community-led, historically informed vision of librarianship, and is boldly future-facing.
This book belongs not just on LIS syllabi but also in strategic planning conversations, diversity training, and curriculum design meetings. It reminds us that real equity requires more than statements—it requires systems change.

References

Piper, G. (2024). "A Black Alt-Ac Speaks: Early Career Librarianship Trauma".
In Jackson, A. P., DeLoach, M. L., & Fenton, M. (Eds.) *Handbook of Black Librarianship*, 3rd edition. (pp. 86-91). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated.

Aminu, A. (2024). "Know Your History: Information Organization in Ballroom Culture and the Potential for Librarianship". In Jackson, A. P., DeLoach, M. L., & Fenton, M. (Eds.) *Handbook of Black Librarianship*, 3rd edition. (pp. 125-128) Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated.

Reviewed by Caelin Ross, Performing Arts Librarian, Arizona State University.

———————————

Shaw, M. K. (2024). *Cataloging Library Resources: An Introduction* (2nd ed.). Rowman and Littlefield.

Technical services departments in libraries are undergoing rapid changes. Cuts to funding at the federal, state, and local levels have strained the budgets of all types of libraries, leading directors to consider the difficult decision of reducing staffing levels. Rather than hire a professional cataloger with a master's in library and information science, libraries may find it cost-effective to hire a non-professional support staff member to perform this same role. However, despite budget cuts, it remains essential for libraries to have talented individuals, professional or not, trained to precisely execute cataloging processes that are both specific to the local institution and necessary for library patrons to easily find the physical and digital resources that meet their information needs. It is this gap in cataloging literature with which *Cataloging Library Resources: An Introduction* fills.

Cataloging Library Resources: An Introduction, 2nd edition (2024) by Marie Keen Shaw is a welcome addition to the literature on learning the basics of cataloging. As a part of the Library Support Staff Handbook series, the contents of this volume meet the required competencies of the American Library Association-Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA) Library Support Staff Certification (LSSC). The ALA-APA LSSC core competencies, as well as key terms relevant to each chapter, appear at the introduction of the text, supporting the goal of the author whereby readers should learn "...many different aspects of the cataloging process…and the skills they should be able to perform to create full bibliographic MARC and item records that meet the highest standards" (p. xiv).

The text itself is divided into three parts. Part I, "Fundamentals of the Cataloging Process," is an overview of the basic elements of cataloging with which support staff should be familiar, including an overview of cataloging and classification today (chapter 1); types of library catalogs, consortia, and organizations relevant to the cataloger (chapter 2); authority control (chapter 3); MARC 21 records (chapter 4); copy cataloging (chapter 5); and metadata (chapter 6). Part II, "Classification of Library Materials," introduces the reader to the organization of library resources using Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) (chapter 7), Library of Congress Classification (LCC) (chapter 8), and subject classification (chapter 9). Finally, Part III, "Cataloging Library Materials," explains the relationship between the cataloging standards of Resource Description and Access (RDA), Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR), and Functional Requirements for Authority Data (FRAD) (chapter 10) and, as an update to the second edition, introduces where the future of cataloging is heading, such as the transition from and conversion of MARC 21 records to BIBFRAME (chapter 11). Chapter twelve in this section offers readers the chance to practice creating MARC 21 records for different types of resources with seven cataloging exercises.

In the preface, Shaw notes the topics covered in this volume are intended to impart practical knowledge and skills to the reader. As such, each chapter is more of an overview rather than offering in-depth theoretical discussion. The seasoned cataloger or the library professional seeking a comprehensive treatment of cataloging topics should look elsewhere. The broad nature in which the author covers the subjects in the text lends itself to certain weaknesses, particularly in Part II, "Classification of Library Materials." While the text provides a good introduction to DDC and LCC, readers would benefit from supplemental practice, either hands-on or from an online program, to become fully comfortable with using and applying call numbers to library resources. Additionally, each chapter concludes with a series of discussion questions and activities for students to practice what they learned. If intending to use the activities from the textbook in the classroom, instructors should proceed with caution. As of writing this review, a few of the web pages used are no longer available.

Despite minute drawbacks, *Cataloging Library Resources: An Introduction* is highly recommended. Using clear, easy-to-understand language, Shaw does not assume prior knowledge on behalf of the reader but writes in a manner where chapters may be read sequentially or on their own. This text will find the most use as an essential text to support courses in Associate-level programs for library and information science at technical and community colleges. However, the appeal of the text reaches far beyond degree-seeking students. In both academic and public library settings, catalogers who are seeking a refresher on various cataloging topics and library staff who suddenly find themselves with cataloging responsibilities due to staffing shifts will find this volume an excellent resource.

Reviewed by Rachel Rabas, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College.

————————————