

Discussion Post 6 – Diversity in Libraries

The public library has always been a place for research, but in recent years, the space has begun to transform into a common-use public space. With the continued decline of accessible third spaces, the ability of libraries to fill this social niche has dramatically improved. Society needs a location where they are able to just exist, and not required to pay for their presence to be acceptable (Roberts-Ganim, 2023). However, with this need comes an added difficulty. It is well and good to declare that 'society' needs a place to engage with their community. However, 'society' can vary dramatically from place to place and culture to culture - and that means that libraries must embrace diverse tactics to fully engage the members of its community. Diversity is incredibly important for libraries - and can manifest itself in a variety of ways. It can be present in the collection of items that the library has to browse. It can be the resources that the staff is able to present to librarygoers. It can even be the people themselves at the branch (though I feel that discussion of diverse hiring practices is a little beyond the scope of this post). With these in mind, I'd like to spend some time addressing the importance of a diverse collection.

In the library collections, diversity is important because otherwise, a branch is unlikely to represent its community - and if a community is not represented, it is unlikely that its needs are being met. Furthermore, archaic sectioning of library branches also discourages certain age groups from using them. If we examine the original Carnegie model of libraries, there were two categories that items could fall into: the children's and the adults' (Velásquez, 2015). While this categorizing may make it easier on catalogers, it completely ignores the existence of teenagers, which can turn an important and information-seeking group of individuals away from the library. Even if a library has a dedicated YA area, consideration on what items are contained in the collection is key. In children's books, diversity demonstrates to children that books are meant for them, and people like them. This can be a problem, when roughly 50% of children's books feature white protagonists (Huyck and Dahlen, 2019). Diversity is important in the library collection, not only so that the books are welcomed by the people who read them, but so the people are welcomed by the books.

Why this Matters:

A representative collection is more than a set of items that fulfills a community's needs. It demonstrates to library patrons that the space has sought out the information they find interesting, the things that they need to progress, and seeks to enable them to accomplish their own goals. By embracing and creating diverse collections, libraries are able to truly integrate with the people who come through the door.

References:

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