Assessing Collection Diversity:
Building Inclusive Care

Dr. Bianca Brillant, Anne Snieg, Jennifer Jones, Thomas Keeler, and Mimi Guessferd

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

(Book spine labels, left to right: Infant, Child, Adolescent, Adult, Elderly, Disability, Caucasian, African-American, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Female, Male, Homosexual, Heterosexual, Bisexual, Asexual, Demisexual, DIVERSITY, WORLD)

Objectives:

A hospital library must address the needs of the patients served across a spectrum, providing inclusive collections to improve health care providers' access to appropriate and accurate information.

Research has demonstrated that health disparities exist between gender, race, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, and socioeconomic status. Hospital library collections have not always been equitably inclusive of diverse communities. To address this issue, the authors developed a survey tool to identify gaps in hospital library collections and guide librarians in developing more diversified collections to better serve the health information needs of medical providers and their patients.

Methods:

The survey tool developed was based off of a diversity audit created by a school librarian in 2020. The librarians were interested in learning about collection items that spoke to the age, gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation of population groups.

When creating questions for the survey, the librarians grouped terms of identity into separate questions and used synonyms where appropriate, such as 'Racial' OR 'Ethnicity' OR 'Racial Groups', based on a controlled vocabulary of medical terms.

The librarians settled on a list of **56 questions** and used a publicly available online tool to administer the survey. The questions and the survey were tested first on the authors' local library collections, before being sent off to a wider audience. Invitations to conduct the survey were sent out via both a listserv message and an email request. Responses were anonymous and the data was calculated in a spreadsheet from the thirty-five participants that were used as a sample population.
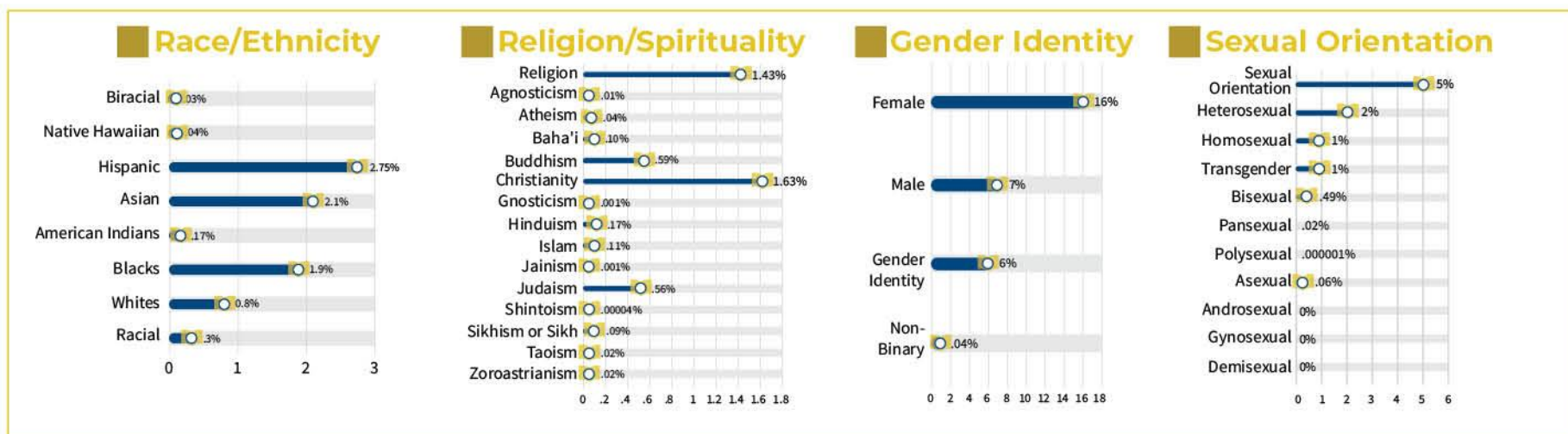
Results

The collection assessments, completed by 16 participants, were based on the following subjects:

- age
- disability
- religion
- gender
- and sexual orientation

The responses revealed "child or children" was the largest age group indexed and represented in 18% (11,458,292) of the 111,932,701 titles, 3.35% (3,917,645) of the holdings covered disability and impairment, 8.09% (9,055,355) of the records included racial terms, 0.37% (414,151) of the collections contained phrases related to cultural awareness, 0.31% (346,991) of titles were classified using religious terminology, gender terms were used to classify 29% (32,460,483) of the titles, and terms related to sexual orientation accounted for 1% (1,119,327).

Race/Ethnicity

- Biracial .03%
- Native Hawaiian .04%
- Hispanic 2.75%
- Asian 2.1%
- American Indians .17%
- Blacks 1.9%
- Whites .8%
- Racial .3%

Religion/Spirituality

- Religion 1.43%
- Agnosticism .01%
- Atheism .04%
- Baha'i .10%
- Buddhism .59%
- Christianity 1.63%
- Gnosticism .001%
- Hinduism .17%
- Islam .11%
- Jainism .001%
- Judaism .56%
- Shintoism .00004%
- Sikhism or Sikh .09%
- Taoism .02%
- Zoroastrianism .02%

Gender Identity

- Female 16%
- Male 7%
- Gender Identity 6%
- Non-Binary .04%

Sexual Orientation

- Sexual Orientation 5%
- Heterosexual 2%
- Homosexual 1%
- Transgender 1%
- Bisexual .49%
- Pansexual .02%
- Polysexual .000001%
- Asexual .06%
- Androsexual 0%
- Gynosexual 0%
- Demisexual 0%

Disability or Impairment

Search Results	1,502,020
Collection Size	58,518,378
%	3.04%

Conclusions

Libraries serve diverse communities with a variety of informational needs. If library collections do not represent the populations served, then it becomes increasingly difficult for those needs to be met. The statistical results of this project, which focused on medical library holdings, reveal how under-representative health science collections currently are.

Findings show several contributing problems to this under-representation, including: some subjectivity in the diversity survey tool's development, a lack of consistency among medical libraries cataloging practices, and issues surrounding controlled vocabularies' use of inaccurate terminology. Despite these issues, and the potential limitations of the survey tool, one of the main findings is that continual assessment of a collection's diversity is essential to improve awareness of diversity, equity, and inclusion concerns.

Scan QR Code

Assessing Diversity in Hospital Library Collections