Automating the Diversity Audit Process

Rachel K. Fischer

INTRODUCTION

I've frequently come across the buzzwords "mirrors and windows" at conference sessions or in articles on collection development and diversity audits. This striking metaphor refers to how books and other items in libraries are windows into other cultures and mirrors that reflect our own lives and experiences. If libraries' collections and programs don't properly reflect the diversity in America, and the whole world, the citizens of this country may not be able to have access to the materials that they need to gain appreciation for other cultures, genders, sexual orientations, or socio-economic statuses. Minorities will continue to feel marginalized by not seeing themselves and their experiences reflected on them in the books they read and movies they watch. Rudine Sims Bishop, the professor who first popularized the metaphor, stated, "When there are enough books available that can act as both mirrors and windows for all our children, they will see that we can celebrate both our differences and similarities, because together they are what makes us human."[1] To get to that point, the first step that libraries need to take is to analyze their collections, programs, toys, and policies by doing a diversity audit. The diversity audit can function as a steppingstone towards an improved collection development policy.

WHAT IS A DIVERSITY AUDIT?

Organizations have historically conducted audits of the diversity of their staff or their policies to avoid lawsuits and to promote systemic change. Once a baseline has been established, the company is expected to make systemic changes to improve the policies and diversity of the staff. The concept of diversity audits is rather new to libraries. Karen Jensen first promoted the concept of a diversity audit of library collections in 2017 in articles published on *School Library Journal's* blog, "Teen Librarian Tool Box."[2] Since then, Sarah Voels, a librarian at the Cedar Rapids Public Library, published a book on the topic titled, *Auditing Diversity in Library Collections*.[3]

Regarding library collections, a diversity audit is a methodology for analyzing the amount of diversity represented by the items in the library to establish a baseline as a benchmark. The audit consists of analyzing the diversity represented by subjects, fictional characters, authors, and illustrators of the items in the library collection. These statistics can be compared to population statistics to set goals for increasing the diversity of the collection. Library programs and toys can also be analyzed. Types of diversity that are typically analyzed include race or ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and socio-economic status.

There are two main manual methodologies that librarians can choose from. Library staff and volunteers can review the titles being audited and record the data in spreadsheets. The statistics are tabulated in the spreadsheet. Audits can be done of titles as they are purchased, randomly selected titles in a collection, or a whole collection. Another option is called a "reverse audit." This type of audit is accomplished by comparing award lists of diverse books, like the Pura Belpré Award, to the collection and purchasing the titles that the library doesn't own.

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Doing a manual audit of a full collection or a whole library can be very time-consuming. Betsy Bird, Collection Development Manager at Evanston Public Library, estimated that it took about 12 weeks to audit 18,508 titles in the Adult Fiction collection. If they were to attempt a manual audit of the whole library, it would take more than 6000 hours to audit 382,981 items. Can you imagine the number of hours it would take to audit the 923,673 bibliographic records for physical items that could be audited in the entire shared database of the Cooperative Computer Services (CCS) Consortium, the consortium that Evanston Public Library is a member of? To accomplish that, an automated process needed to be utilized.

EXISTING AUTOMATED TOOLS FOR DIVERSITY AUDITS

Several vendors are already providing an automated diversity audit service. Diverse BookFinder's Collection Analysis Tool (CAT) is a free diversity audit tool for picture books. It is an award-winning digital tool that's financially supported by Bates College and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The Director and Founder of the website is Associate Dean of Faculty and Professor of Psychology at Bates College, Dr. Krista Aronson. Diverse BookFinder has collected and analyzed more than 3,000 picture books published since 2002 featuring Black people, Indigenous people, and People of Color (BIPOC). CAT allows you to upload a list of ISBNs and titles. The file is compared to the Diverse BookFinder (DBF) collection. CAT produces a report that depicts the results of the analysis in graphs. The report explains how many titles match the DBF collection. The graphs describe the representation of ethnicities in the collection that matches the DBF collection and how they are represented, such as in a biography or folklore. Although this service is free, its capabilities are limited to analyzing the titles that match the DBF collection.

The two leading collection analysis tools, collectionHQ and LibraryIQ, both include diversity audit reports. CollectionHQ is vendor neutral and owned by Baker and Taylor. It specializes in Public Libraries. LibraryIQ is also vendor neutral and can support all types of libraries and library consortia. Both services can analyze the diversity of the collection. They each have a user-friendly interface and graphs that are easily understood. CollectionHQ is now offering customers of Baker and Taylor's cataloging utility, BTCat, the ability to add Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) subject headings to bibliographic records as a bulk process. However, only LibraryIQ can suggest items to purchase to increase the diversity of the collection.

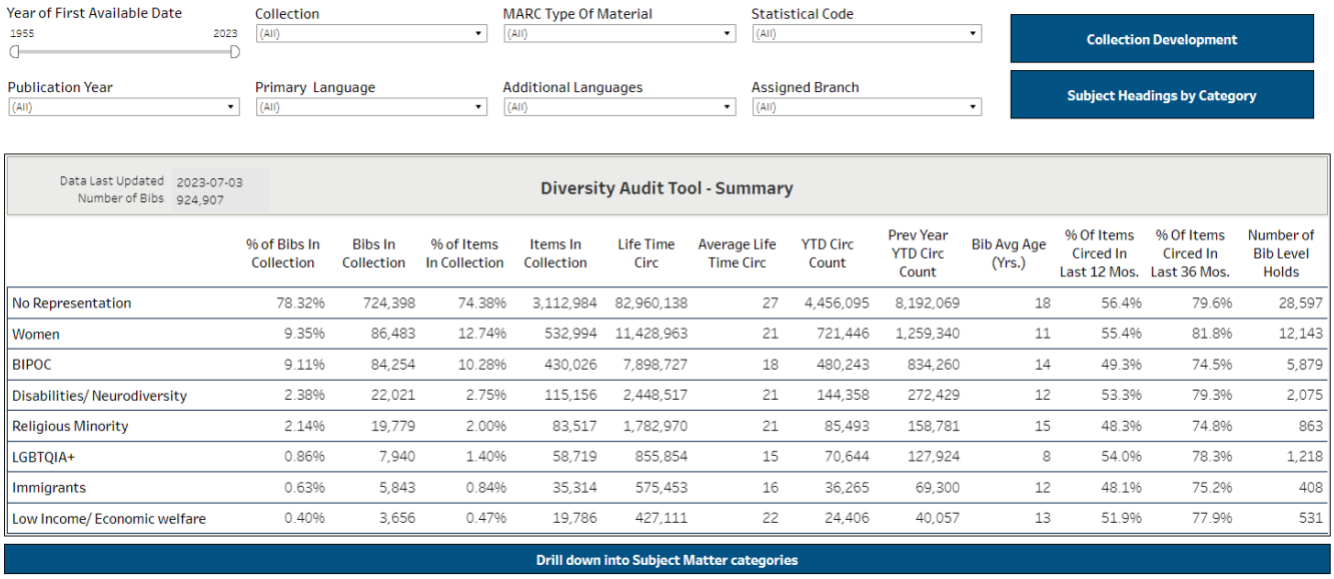
In addition to Baker and Taylor, other major library vendors, such as Ingram and Midwest Tape, include diversity audit services. Both companies allow customers to purchase a one-time analysis of their collection(s). Ingram's report includes data for the whole collection compared to the public library average for comparison. A separate report includes suggestions of diverse titles to purchase to improve the diversity of the collection. Midwest Tape's Library Collection Diversity Audit specifically audits video and audiobook collections. This service also produces a report analyzing the diversity of the collection and identifies areas to improve. However, the company utilizes a third-party to assist them in providing community demographic data to compare the library's collection to local and national demographics. Midwest Tape's service is also integrated with Hoopla Instant to help the customer fill in the gaps in diversity in the collection.

COOPERATIVE COMPUTER SERVICES' DIVERSITY AUDIT TOOL

Not all libraries are able to spend money on a diversity audit service provided by vendors. However, libraries that already have a systems administrator who is well-versed in SQL or other query languages that are used by their ILS can create their own automated diversity audit tool. CCS has completed the creation of a diversity audit tool using Tableau (see fig. 1). This tool

analyzes the diversity of the physical items in the member libraries' collections according to the subject headings of the bibliographic records and allows the libraries to benchmark against the whole consortium's data or other libraries of similar demographics. The categories audited include women, BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, disabilities/neurodiversity, religious minorities, immigrants, and low income/economic welfare. Like vendor provided diversity audits, the CCS Diversity Audit Tool is limited to the data in the bibliographic record. Only the subject of the titles can be audited, not the characteristics of characters or creators. The tool also includes a function to drill down into the data of narrower subcategories. In addition to the diversity audit dashboard, a collection development dashboard allows the librarians to identify popular titles on diverse topics that are owned by other libraries that they don't own yet. This makes the selection and cataloging processes more efficient because the library already knows that these books will be checked out and the bibliographic record already exists. For an introduction to the Tool, check out the video at: https://youtu.be/Nonp2MGsSUo. Information about the SQL query that is used to pull the data from the database and build the tables that Tableau uses to analyze the data can be found at: https://reports.ccslib.org/divDoc.

Figure 1. CCS Diversity Audit Tool



	% of Bibs In Collection	Bibs In Collection	% of Items In Collection	Items In Collection	Life Time Circ	Average Life Time Circ	YTD Circ Count	Prev Year YTD Circ Count	Bib Avg Age (Yrs.)	% Of Items Circed In Last 12 Mos.	% Of Items Circed In Last 36 Mos.	Number of Bib Level Holds
No Representation	78.32%	724,398	74.38%	3,112,984	82,960,138	27	4,456,095	8,192,069	18	56.4%	79.6%	28,597
Women	9.35%	86,483	12.74%	532,994	11,428,963	21	721,446	1,259,340	11	55.4%	81.8%	12,143
BIPOC	9.11%	84,254	10.28%	430,026	7,898,727	18	480,243	834,260	14	49.3%	74.5%	5,879
Disabilities/ Neurodiversity	2.38%	22,021	2.75%	115,156	2,448,517	21	144,358	272,429	12	53.3%	79.3%	2,075
Religious Minority	2.14%	19,779	2.00%	83,517	1,782,970	21	85,493	158,781	15	48.3%	74.8%	863
LGBTQIA+	0.86%	7,940	1.40%	58,719	855,854	15	70,644	127,924	8	54.0%	78.3%	1,218
Immigrants	0.63%	5,843	0.84%	35,314	575,453	16	36,265	69,300	12	48.1%	75.2%	408
Low Income/ Economic welfare	0.40%	3,656	0.47%	19,786	427,111	22	24,406	40,057	13	51.9%	77.9%	531

CONCLUSION

Auditing the diversity of a whole library collection is possible with the use of automated diversity audit tools. With a growing number of vendors offering diversity audit services that are integrated into their collection development and sales platforms, it is becoming increasingly easier for selectors to identify diverse titles to add to library collections. IT, systems administrators, and even catalogers without selector duties, don't have to sit on the sidelines. They can become active contributors by working within libraries and consortia to create their own diversity audit tools using Tableau, Google Data Studio, or even Excel. Although homegrown solutions have limitations, being able to analyze an entire library or consortium automatically can greatly improve the efficiency of the diversity audit process and supplement the manual methodology.

ENDNOTES

[1] Rudine Sims Bishop, "Mirrors, Window, and Sliding Glass Doors," *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom* 6, no. 3 (1990), https://scenicregional.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Mirrors-Windows-and-Sliding-Glass-Doors.pdf.

[2] Karen Jensen, "Doing a YA Collection Diversity Audit: Understanding Your Local Community (Part 1)," *Teen Librarian Toolbox, School Library Journal,* November 1, 2017, https://teenlibrariantoolbox.com/2017/11/01/doing-a-diversity-audit-understanding-your-local-community/.

[3] Sarah Voels, *Auditing Diversity in Library Collections* (Santa Barbara: CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2022).