Old Dominion University

LIBS 680: Culturally Responsive Librarianship

Diversity Audit

Dr. Jennifer Brown

July 24, 2022
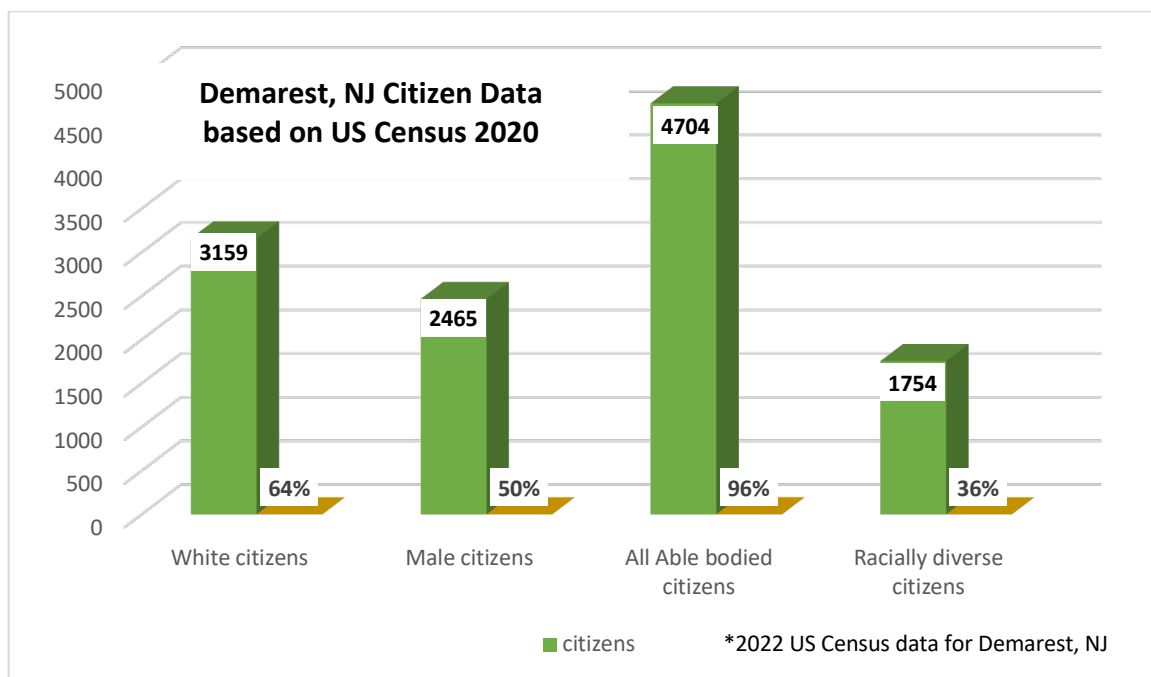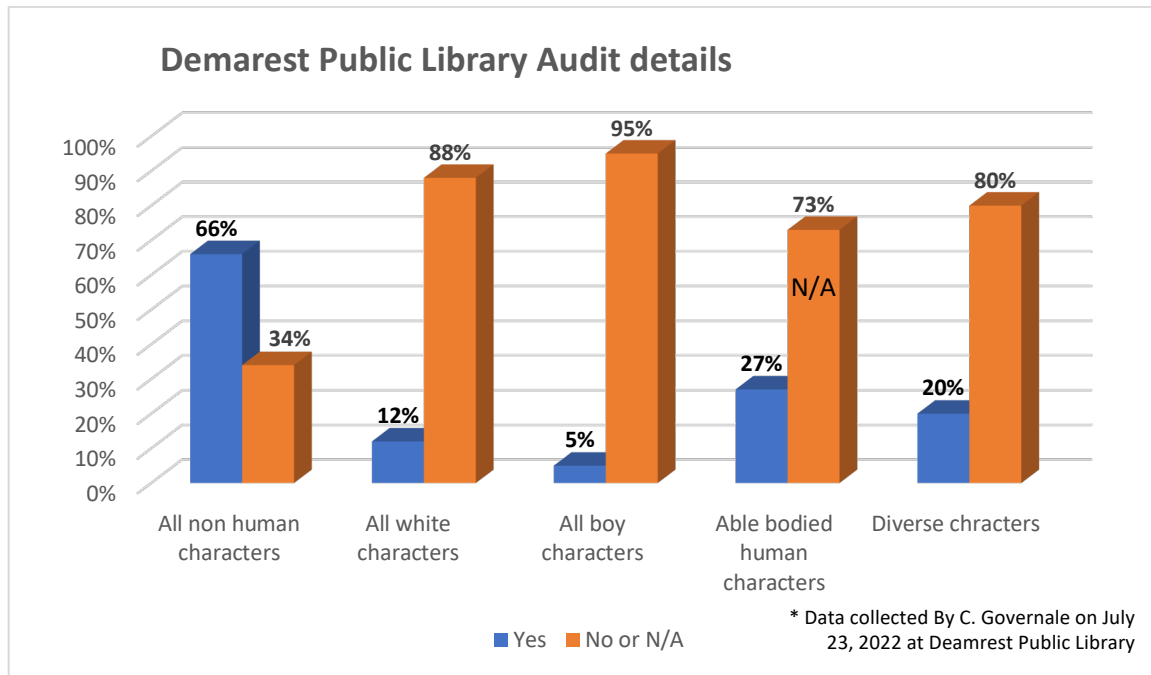
Christen Governale

Diversity Audit

Introduction:

Demarest Public Library is located in Demarest, New Jersey. The town has a population of 4,911 according to the US Census (2020). It is a small suburban, primarily white, and mid/upper class community. The Demarest Public Library website states that the library strives to be a valued extension of the community (Demarest Library, n.a.). The question is, do the books in the library accurately represent the community it supports? To determine this, I performed an audit by sampling picture book covers focused specifically on all "T" authors. This section encompassed 74 books. I used a yes/no(n/a) tally sheet to assess 5 categories.

        1. If all cover characters were non-human,

        2. If all cover characters were white,

        3. If all cover characters were boys,

        4. If all cover characters were able bodied, and

        5. If any of the cover characters represented diversity.

Findings of my audit:

It was highlighted in the audit that picture book covers showing non-human characters whether it be animals, shapes or scenes without people were most prominent (66%). Diverse characters were shown 20% of the time, but not to the extent that I thought or what our town demographics (36%) showed. It also was interesting to see that boys (5%) and whites (12%) were NOT dominant or community reflective in these book covers vs the census data showing a 50% male, and 64% white. And lastly, it was difficult to determine able bodies since many of the

pictures were partial or not easily assessed what the disability might be. Although 4% of our

community is disabled, I cannot from the audit data say that they are being represented. That

component is inconclusive, in my opinion.

Demarest Public Library Audit details

* Data collected By C. Governale on July 23, 2022 at Deamrest Public Library

■ Yes ■ No or N/A

Demarest, NJ Citizen Data based on US Census 2020

■ citizens   *2022 US Census data for Demarest, NJ

Discussion/Interpretation:

In Dr. Burns' lecture, she said something like animals in picture books were "diversity cop- outs" (my words, not hers). I don't see it that way. I view animals and non-human characters as even more inclusive and diverse than just people. Multi-species, and multi-forms unite children with the whole world in a way only imaginative youth can appreciate. They can entertain the idea that we are all connected and share more similarities than differences. I do still agree with the need to see and read about people in your own image for validation and inspiration. I only suggest that non-human characters offer additional inclusivity and are welcomed.

I would suggest, based upon the audit that the collection could be better linked to the community's demographics. In particular, two ways to do this would be to provide additional human diverse cover characters, and also to ensure more boys and girls also are seen. I would assume that our youth services librarian has not had the time to do an audit like this but I certainly want to share the results with her later.

The weakness in the collection and my audit was in reference to identified disabilities seen on book covers. As noted, there was 73% of the collection sample that was "Not Applicable" since it was imperceivable if there was a disability shown. That point alone, is a red flag. Our community has a 4% representation of known disabilities, and yet there are many more that are not gathered by the Census Bureau, such as learning challenges etc.

Plan for Improvement:

Looking to improve this collection, I would suggest a bit more research and evaluation, and

seek to develop a more robust collection of supporting our community. With a 36% racial

diversity, we have room to grow in representing accurately the faces and cultures of our

community. We have a strong Korean population as well as an emerging Israeli population.

This requires not only English books, but also multi-language resources to be added.

It would also be pertinent to address children with special learning needs, like ADHD and

Autism. Although special needs student numbers are anecdotal, Demarest school system is

known for its extensive special education programming and has families moving specifically to

town for this support. The library has yet to address with resources and programming these

community members and their unique needs. I would look to research this point more as well

and add to the resources that represent them.

References

Demarest Public Library, (n.d.). About. Mission.
        https://www.demarestlibrary.org/about/mission/

United States Census Bureau, (2020) Demarest New Jersey.
        https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=demarest,%20nj&tid=ACSDP5Y2020.DP05